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# FERDINAND CASTLETON.

A NOVEL.

“ A Christian is the highest style of man.”—YOUNG.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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# FERDINAND CASTLETON.

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## PART I.

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### INTRODUCTION.

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#### CHAPTER I.

It was on a fine morning in the month of April, 184—, that the crowd of carriages assembled at the vestry door of the church of St. George's, Hanover Square, proclaimed to the public in general, that an aristocratic wedding was taking place within the time-honoured walls of that ancient edifice.

If those walls could have had, not only ears to hear, but a voice to tell what they had heard, or, more still, an eye to penetrate the depths of the hearts of those who have here assembled on similar occasions, what a marvellous series of histories could they not narrate! What tales of joy, of sorrow, of pride, of self-sacrifice, of the consummation of earthly happiness, and of the desecration of the heart's holiest affections! now they would speak of the incomparable happiness of those who, after perhaps a long, long period of doubt, grief, or anxiety, were at last reaping the reward of their faithfulness to each other, and trust in the Divine Providence! —now, again, they would tell of the awe and dread that *must* make themselves felt, when, in the presence of God, the affections which He has given for most holy purposes are sacrificed on the shrine of Mammon!

They would speak of the heart-sinking felt by the worldly mother, who, till that

last moment, had persuaded herself into believing that it was *really* for her beloved daughter's good that she was sacrificing her to an unworthy husband, merely for his title or wealth ; but who at this dread hour *felt* that that happiness was being placed in awful jeopardy.

They would tell of the bride, who, adorned with the outward garb of innocence and simplicity, feels that she is an acting lie ; that she neither loves nor honours him whom she is now vowing to love and to honour for the remainder of her life ; and that the glitter of the tinsel, which has hitherto blinded her eyes, is no recompense for the loss of that sterling metal of deep and true affection, which is never destined to be hers.

They would tell, too, of the sharp pang, felt even by the seared conscience of him who *knows* that, while he is solemnly vowing to protect and love the innocent being whose only hope on earth is in him, he

has really *no* heart to give, or has already given it to another.

The happiness felt, when thus they stand together before God's altar, by those who *truly* love, had need be great to counter-balance all the conflicting emotions called forth in those who, under the same outward circumstances, are not so happily situated !

And if these walls, in addition to the view into the hearts of those present, could also penetrate into futurity, and catch a glimpse of the future existence of those who are now within their precincts, what startling contrasts, what wonderful changes would there not be presented to them ? Here the girl, who now pledges her obedience to her husband, and from her heart intends to keep her vow, changed to the neglectful, wilful wife, careless of her husband's happiness, comfort, and well-being. There the bridegroom, who is vowing to love and cherish, changed to the cruel oppressor, the worst of all op-



pressors, the oppressor of the heart, exulting in his power, and wilfully torturing that heart which would shed its best blood in his service.—Here, too, the bright, happy, joyous spirit of those who, in the audacity of youth, dare to think this world's happiness eternal, and that they are now entering on a scene of joy destined to be unclouded for their whole life-time, changed, it may be in a few years, in a few months, to that deep, heart-rending sorrow of those who grieve for the loss of all that can make this life a scene of aught but misery to them. That blooming girl may be destined, ere many days, to change her chaplet of orange-blossoms for the cap of the widow ; and for the cup of joy she is now raising to her lips, may be condemned to drink the cup of anguish to the very dregs—or, perhaps even worse than this, she may live to see him, whose heart she thinks is bound to her for ever, become alienated from her, at war with her and with his God. She may live to

feel that, though now she hopes to be united to him for ever, both in this world and in the next, his fate is eternally dis-severed widely from hers. Oh ! the blindness of mortals, to wish to penetrate into futurity ! How few, how *very*, VERY few happy moments would any of us enjoy in this world, could the dread secrets of the future be laid open to our gaze !

But we have stayed too long outside the walls of the church, and must now join the crowd collected in the galleries to criticise the dress and deportment of the bride and bridegroom, and the *tout-ensemble* of the wedding.

It would be more in accordance with the rules of courtesy, if we were to begin with a description of the bride ; but as she is destined to play a far more important part in our tale than her husband, and will therefore require a more detailed notice, we will proceed in the first instance to state, that the bridegroom, Sir William Pleydell, Bart., was a gentleman of about

thirty years of age, or perhaps rather more, with pleasing though not very intellectual features, and an expression of countenance which at once impressed the beholder with a greater idea of good-nature than of talent, while his whole exterior left no doubt of his being as well a gentleman as a man of fashion. He was in fact both. Left an orphan at an early age, and brought up with the knowledge that he had only to wait till he attained the magical age of one-and-twenty to come into the possession of an ample fortune, he had never taken any very great pains to improve the intellects that nature had given him, and which he was not called upon to exercise in order to procure his daily bread—in fact, it was very much to his credit that under his circumstances no one had ever accused him of being vicious. Idle he was in his youth, and though now he was in Parliament, and in that way found his time more occupied than it had ever been before, he was not

a hard-working member, though, between that and the care of his estates in the country, he found what appeared to him overwhelming occupations. In the gay world of London he encountered the Lady Barbara Castleton, whom he first admired, then flirted with, and to whom he finally offered his heart and hand; the consequence of the acceptance of which was the occasion of his appearing in church in the character of bridegroom on the morning in question.

Of the bride, the Lady Barbara, we must speak at some length. Her father, the Earl of Stapleford, had been from his youth a very keen politician, and, when he married, his young wife soon found that she was not destined to supplant his beloved politics; and that in fact he had married her very much for the sake of obtaining an heir to his title and large estates, which would otherwise go to a distant relation. If that were the case, his wish was soon gratified, for not only

did she bring him a son and heir in the first year of her marriage, but, as if to make assurance doubly sure, a second son soon followed on the heels of his brother. The Earl always treated her with great kindness and consideration; and, though at first rather mortified at finding how little hold she really had upon his affections, she was far too sensible to bemoan herself with vain regrets, and sought and found an absorbing interest and occupation in the education of her two sons, whose noble natural dispositions amply repaid the sedulous care that she lavished upon them; but still, though she strove to be quite contented, and to think how far more blessed she was than by any merits of hers she could lay claim to be, she could not help occasionally regretting that it had not pleased Providence to grant her the boon of a daughter; and this regret, which when the boys were mere children was slight and little felt, pressed more and more severely upon her as they grew

up, and in the natural course of events became, and would become, as years went by, more and more separated from her.

She felt that, when once they were gone to school, there was an end of the constant and sweet companionship which a daughter might afford her during the many long hours in which Lord Stapleford was engaged by public business; she felt that, from the time when they first left the paternal roof, they would never form the same link in the chain of her existence that they had done before; from school they would go to college, and as soon as ever Lord Abbotsham was of age, she felt sure that his father would urge him to enter the House of Commons, and busy himself in political life, while Ferdinand was of course destined to work out his own fortune in some way or other—possibly even in diplomacy, though this was a contingency at which the poor mother shuddered, as the idea of the long exile at foreign courts, which that profession would

entail upon her favourite son, was too dreadful for her to contemplate with her usual calmness. Her joy may therefore be imagined, when, no less than twelve years after the birth of her youngest son, she was blessed with a daughter ; on which occasion Lord Stapleford was so far startled out of his usual indifference as to insist on its being called Barbara, after its mother.

The three years that succeeded were probably the happiest of Lady Stapleford's existence—in the occupation of watching the developing of the little Barbara's budding beauty, and the dawning of her intellects, the time flew rapidly by, cheered as it was by the occasional presence at home of her beloved sons, who were scarcely less dear to her than her daughter. At the expiration of this period, however, the Lady Barbara had a severe attack of measles, and, though she entirely recovered from it, the disease assailed her mother, whose frame, enfeebled by watching and

anxiety, was unable to bear up against the violence of the fever; and thus, at the early age of forty, the good, the virtuous, the exemplary Lady Stapleford was removed from this world to a better.

The loss to all her family was indeed severe—to Lord Stapleford she had been a most excellent wife, and he felt her loss more deeply than he could perhaps have imagined—her sons, especially Ferdinand, mourned her with all the violent grief of those, who, old enough to appreciate the loss, are not sufficiently advanced in life to have become callous or inured to its misfortunes. It was their first sorrow, and deeply did they feel it. But, if to them the loss was so great, to the little Barbara it was irreparable—they had reached the age when the character is in a great measure formed; the good seed had taken deep root in their hearts, and there was not so much chance of its being choked up with thorns—but in her case the seed was barely sown, and it would, indeed, require



a careful husbandman to watch it, so that it might arrive at maturity. She was too young to feel her misfortune as her brothers did ; but, for that very reason, her loss was all the greater, though she knew it not.

As soon as Lord Stapleford had partially recovered from the shock occasioned by the death of his wife, his first care was to provide a governess for his daughter. His choice fell upon a Madame Duchesne, who combined the advantages of being a French woman, and a Protestant, with an agreeable address and lady-like manner. Under her tuition, the young lady passed a happy, careless childhood ; Madame Duchesne was far too good-natured to worry her pupil by making her learn more than was absolutely necessary ; and, as her own acquirements were not very solid, she was easily satisfied with the progress made by her pupil, who to an amiable disposition united a considerable facility for acquiring information ; and, as

long as her manners were lady-like, her French accent correct, her dancing lessons properly attended to, and a tolerable proficiency attained in music, Madame Duchesne was satisfied. The Lady Barbara consequently grew up adorned with all the outward accomplishments calculated to make her shine in society, and with her naturally sweet temper unembittered by any collisions with that of her governess, which was almost on a par with her own. But in all the more solid branches of education she was lamentably ignorant, and her religion was but little better than formalism ; Madame Duchesne having few ideas on that subject herself, and having been often embarrassed by her pupil's childish enquiries, discouraged the topic, and to both of them it was little more than a name.

When the time arrived for the Lady Barbara to be presented and to "come out," Lord Stapleford was somewhat puzzled in the choice of a *chaperone*, but at

last fixed upon a Mrs. Maxwell, the wife of Lady Stapleford's brother, who, having no daughters of her own, and being very fond of the world, was only too happy to have the young and pretty Lady Barbara confided to her care. Mrs. Maxwell's whole idea of the object of a young lady's life was, that she should go to as many fashionable balls and parties as possible, and finish by making a good marriage. Under her care, therefore, it was not to be supposed the Lady Barbara would improve much on the lessons received from her governess. True, she never contracted many of the worst faults which characterise those who are devoted to the London world ; her good nature revolted from the malicious pleasure taken by some in descanting on the follies and failings of their friends and acquaintances, and her kind-heartedness made her always ready to do anything that could be of service to those who were a step below her in rank, wealth, or beauty ; but, in spite of these

redeeming features, she was heart and soul a denizen of the world, and had no object beyond its triumphs and pleasures. Thus then, pretty, agreeable, with high rank and tolerable fortune, she had attracted the attention of Sir William Pleydell; and after being out for six or seven seasons, and having refused various offers, she had finally accepted his, and was now taking upon herself the duties of married life, which she was singularly illcalculated to perform.

To the *eye*, however, all was perfect; and her appearance gave unmingled satisfaction to the body of spectators in the galleries, whose attention, however, though strongly occupied, was speedily diverted from its object by the deep, mellow voice of the clergyman, who now commenced reading that beautiful service, which our Church directs to be used on these occasions. The service is at all times a solemn and peculiarly striking one, but when pronounced by such a voice as Ferdinand Castleton's,

who was now reading it, it attracted the attention of the most careless, and made the most thoughtless reflect, for at least a brief space, on the nature of the ceremony now being performed. They who had been busy with their opera-glasses now laid them aside, and seemed to recollect that they were attending a religious ceremony, and not a theatrical representation ; and while, from an instinctive feeling of propriety, they dispensed with the use of those adjuncts, they felt their eyes irresistibly drawn from the blooming bride and her rich attire to the tall commanding figure that stood on the other side of the rails, and from whose lips were flowing the solemn words, in a tone which owed its impressiveness, not merely to his beautifully modulated voice, but to the deep, heartfelt manner in which they were uttered. Deeply did he feel their solemnity ; deeply did he feel the force of the recollections of the past that thronged upon him as he spoke, and deeply did he

feel the importance of the moment to the lifelong welfare of his own only sister; deeply, then, did the force of these mingled feelings make itself felt in his performance of the solemn ceremony; and many there were who left the church that day with higher and holier ideas of the state of matrimony than had ever before presented themselves to their minds.

To those who studied physiognomy and took pleasure in tracing the workings of the soul through the external veil of its fleshly covering, Ferdinand Castleton was by far the most interesting of the bridal party. He had a tall and commanding figure, with a face in which Christian humility served to soften and subdue the brightness of intellectual power which pervaded it. His head was slightly bald, and the hair receding from his temples gave a still more striking appearance to his lofty and distinguished forehead. His hair, moreover, was slightly tinged with

grey, though he had not numbered more than eight-and-thirty summers ; and this circumstance, coupled with the lines that already marked his face, showed that grief and anxiety had done their work upon him, and had produced those effects naturally only due to a much more advanced age. His eye was blue, penetrating, and yet conciliating, piercing, yet soft and gentle as a woman's ; it could sternly rebuke the hardened sinner, and yet softly attract the penitent to confession, and invite him to pursue the path of reformation. His mouth was small and beautifully formed ; but there, too, the occasional quivering of the upper lip told its tale of unsubdued feelings and rebellious sensibility. There seemed, moreover, to be something in the service in which he was engaged that acted with peculiar force upon these feelings, for his voice, at first clear and loud enough to be distinctly heard throughout the church, became lower and feebler as he proceeded,

and at one time threatened to impair the effect of his reading ; but by an apparent effort he recovered himself, and went through, unfalteringly to the end. His evident emotion, however, produced its effect upon the rest of the party, especially those who were acquainted with its cause ; and, as they re-entered their carriages, there was hardly a dry eye amongst, at any rate, the *female* portion of the assembly.

“ I fear it must have been a sore trial to poor Ferdinand’s feelings,” said Lady Abbotsham to her husband, as soon as she had recovered herself. “ Poor fellow ! it was all that he could do to command his voice ; and yet how beautifully he read the service ! It was quite a thing to hear once in one’s life, and remember to one’s dying hour.”

“ Yes, indeed,” replied Lord Abbotsham ; “ he read beautifully, and, I fear, must have suffered much in doing so. I was very much opposed to his being asked



to perform the ceremony at all ; but Barbara had so set her heart upon it, and you know Ferdinand never considers his own wishes or feelings when those of others are at all concerned."

"Barbara said that he must be so accustomed to reading the service for his poorer parishioners, that there could be nothing peculiarly painful in his doing so for her ; and there certainly seemed to be some reason in what she said."

"Very true ; but then it is a widely different thing performing it for people in whom one feels little or no interest, and for those one loves ; and then that church—it must have recalled most painfully the occasion of his own marriage, the last time probably that he was present in it on such an occasion. But Ferdinand is so good, so considerate for others ; so self-sacrificing ! I heard him promise, just before we went to church, that he would go to Cambridge to-morrow to vote at the election. Now I know that, in the

first place, he was very anxious to return home as soon as possible, and this journey must delay his return for two or three days ; and then, there are many reasons, as you know, why a visit to Cambridge must recall to him a whole throng of painful recollections. I did venture to express to him my surprise ; but he said that his friend Smithson was very anxious to get in, and, that it would be so very close a contest, that every vote would be peculiarly valuable ; and that, moreover, he thought the principles of Smithson's opponent so very dangerous, that he considered it his duty to offer them every opposition in his power, and so he has promised to be off to-morrow, and record his vote according to Smithson's wishes."

" Well, he is really a noble fellow, and worthy of being your brother," said Lady Abbotsham, fondly.

" Nay, say not so," replied Lord Abbotsham gravely ; " he is far, far superior to me. I would that I could lay to my credit

one half of the good that he does, or the self-denial that he practises ; but bitter have been his trials in this world, and great, I trust, will be his reward in the future.

## CHAPTER II.

IN the gardens, or, more properly, pleasure grounds, which form so great an ornament of the University of Cambridge, there is no spot from which the eye takes in a picture, which nature and art have combined to render so pleasingly beautiful, as from the bridge which crosses the river at the back of King's College. In front flows the calm, placid stream, gliding imperceptibly along under the two beautiful bridges of Clare Hall and Trinity, by which it is successively spanned ; at first bordered by banks of turf, as smooth

as velvet, and as green as emerald, and then, as it passes under the first bridge, overshadowed by the trees which form the avenue to Clare Hall, and which, in their turn, are succeeded by the beautiful limes that adorn the walks of Trinity. To the right, the pretty and elegant structure of Clare Hall fills up the picture, without forcing itself on the eye, which, still further to the right, takes in the towers and pinnacles of that most magnificent of edifices, King's College Chapel, the *chef-d'œuvre* of English ecclesiastical architecture.

It was to this spot that, on the evening following that in which the events took place mentioned in the last chapter, Ferdinand Castleton might have been seen pensively wending his way. When he attained the bridge in question, he leaned his folded arms upon the parapet and gazed upon the scene before him. The sun had long since set ; the last ray of twilight even had disappeared ; there was

no moon, but it was one of those lovely cloudless evenings which our capricious climate sometimes affords us, when the stars shine with such a radiance, that the heavens seem imbued with light, and objects at some distance are perfectly visible. Much has been said and written, both in prose and poetry, about the moon ; but there is a beauty in a pure unclouded, moonless night, when the stars seem to stand forth in their sparkling beauty from the back ground of blue, so deep as to be well nigh black, that may almost claim a superiority over the most silvery moonlight that ever " slept upon a bank." At such a time we feel conscious of the immensity of space ; the stars no longer appear like gilt studs in a solid ceiling, but seem almost to be endued with life ; we become conscious of their distance from us and from each other ; and the blue void seems to extend as far beyond them as they from us. As Ferdinand lowered his gaze from the contemplation of this

wondrous spectacle, it fell upon the calm bosom of the river, which again reflected in all its beauty the glory of the brilliant firmament above. A gentle breeze murmured among the trees, but did not ruffle the smooth surface of the water; everything else was hushed. The pinnacles of King's Chapel, towering against the sky, were not more still than all nature appeared at that moment. It was a time when the most careless would be disposed to meditation, when the gayest might be sad. But Ferdinand was neither careless nor gay; and, as his eyes drank in the beauty of all around, he felt a deep, deep sadness stealing over his soul. Suddenly the melodious chimes of St. Mary's struck the hour of nine, and immediately the solemn tone of the bell tolling the curfew vibrated through the air. As these sounds fell upon his ear, Ferdinand could no longer contain himself; and, for the first time for many a year, his long repressed feelings gained the mastery, and the strong man

wept like a child. What neither his sister's wedding, nor the sight of ancient haunts and long-forgotten faces (albeit these recalled many a painful recollection), could effect, the simple sound of that well-remembered bell, at that solemn hour, brought to pass: and for many minutes his whole frame shook with his agony.

But, in order to explain why these sights and sounds should have such a powerful effect on Ferdinand Castleton's mind, we must retrace our steps a little, and give the reader a slight sketch of his previous history.

We have seen that, at the age of fifteen, he had the misfortune to lose his mother; and, for the three following years, no event of importance occurred in his existence. At eighteen he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, being extremely anxious to enjoy the advantage of a university education. His father had originally intended to have procured him an appointment as *attaché*, but he



yielded to his son's solicitations the more readily, as there was a valuable family living likely to fall vacant, and he was not without hopes that Ferdinand might ultimately qualify himself to hold it. To this idea, however, Ferdinand himself gave no encouragement; he said that, much as he respected the profession of the church and those who belonged to it, it was not one for which he himself felt any inclination. In his severer moods he was disposed to literature, science, and the fine arts; in his gayer, he was devotedly fond of society; in which, from his general information and agreeable polished manners, he was eminently calculated to shine. He said, therefore, that he should much prefer being placed in some appointment in London, which his father could easily obtain for him; and that he would rather be a poor man, with liberty to follow his own inclinations, than a rich one, tied to a profession for which he had no liking. For his ideas of a Christian

minister's life and duties were so high and holy, that he shrank with horror from the notion of only holding a living as a comfortable sinecure, and passing his time in other and more congenial pursuits, unconnected with his profession.

"If I am to be a clergyman," he would say, "I will be one thoroughly; and I shall count every hour lost that is not devoted to the service of my Master."

Lord Stapleford thought his notions rather over-strained and romantic, but he respected his "prejudices," as he regarded them; and being an indulgent, though somewhat careless, father, he allowed the young Ferdinand to do as he pleased in the matter, giving him, however, clearly to understand that the course of life that he was inclined to follow was not the one to make him rich; and that he could settle but an ordinary younger brother's fortune upon him at his death, though, during his life, he was willing to make him a handsome allowance.

Soon after his arrival at the university, Ferdinand made the acquaintance of a Mr. De Vere, the owner of a considerable property in the neighbourhood. To a man endued with Ferdinand's disposition and love of society—especially ladies' society—this acquaintance was a great acquisition, and formed a most agreeable variety to the somewhat monotonous course of university life. Mr. De Vere was an old friend of his father's, of whose party, also, he was a strong political supporter, and he therefore showed every hospitality in his power to young Castleton, who was not slow to profit by the opportunities thus afforded him. Ferdinand, by his father's liberality, was enabled to keep a horse at college ; Mr De Vere's place was only ten miles off ; so that nothing was more natural than that he should be found constantly cantering in the direction of Vere park.

Mr. De Vere's family consisted of his wife and one only daughter. His property was strictly entailed in the male line, and he

was extremely desirous that his daughter, by marrying his nephew and heir, should continue in the enjoyment of her father's property. He had never, however, made known these intentions to the young lady ; hoping that she would be more likely to form an attachment to her cousin, if there were no apparent exertions used to bring such an event about.

Louisa De Vere, at the time of Ferdinand's first making her acquaintance, had not completed her seventeenth year, and was endued with charms fitted to captivate a far less susceptible heart than his. Of a slight and graceful figure, rather under than over the middle size, with a face which a brilliant complexion, laughing blue eyes, pearly teeth, coral lips, and dark arched eyebrows, combined to render dazzlingly beautiful, and hair whose glossy blackness served to set off to the utmost advantage the brilliant whiteness of her skin, she possessed, indeed, outward attractions of the highest order ; to which

she added mental qualifications of the greatest promise, and an innate talent for wit and humour, which, even at her early age, rendered her conversation, when unrestrained by the presence of strangers, most agreeable and entertaining.

She soon ceased to look upon Ferdinand as a stranger ; his position, as the son of her father's friend, gave him a certain claim upon her own friendship, which he was not slow in asserting, and which his own agreeable manners and handsome person soon converted into a friendship for him, for his own sake. Many were the happy hours that they spent together at Vere Park. Often he would ride over, on a summer afternoon (for the sun's heat did not deter *him* from his ten-mile ride), and, after spending an agreeable hour or so with Mrs. and Miss De Vere, be pressed to stay to dinner ; and then, as Mrs. De Vere would be too busy to waste the whole afternoon with him, as she would good-naturedly say, he would

be turned out to take a stroll in the gardens and shrubberies with the young Louisa. Then the gay, lively dinner, followed by the *séance* with Mr. De Vere; the only part of the day that he somewhat dreaded, and from which he would manage to make his escape as soon as possible, and coax Mrs. De Vere into letting him take "just one little turn in front of the windows" with Louisa; and then Mrs. De Vere would shake her head, but let them go, notwithstanding: for she saw Louisa's eyes sparkle at the thought, and she could refuse her darling daughter nothing.

Many people will doubtless accuse Mrs. De Vere of imprudence, in permitting so much unrestrained intercourse between the young people; and she may, perhaps, in some degree, deserve the imputation; but, though she was not absolutely blind to the possible consequences, she reasoned herself into the belief that they were much too young for it to be of any real importance; and moreover, she said to herself,

that Louisa was coming out in another year, and that then she would soon, in the glitter of the London world, forget her childish regard for young Castleton : and it must be remarked, too, that neither of the young people themselves ever guessed that they were in love. Ferdinand was perfectly aware that he took greater pleasure in her society than in that of any one else, and that she was always uppermost in his thoughts ; but he had no rival. Mr. De Vere did not happen to be acquainted with any other Cambridge young man at that time, and Ferdinand consequently wanted that excitement which so often opens the eyes of those who, till they have felt the pangs of jealousy, have no idea that they are in the chains of love. She, on her part, never took the trouble of analysing her sensations, and her mother had taken care that she should have no bevy of female friends to do it for her ; so that she never suspected that her feelings for Ferdinand were any thing but a warm

friendship for his virtues, admiration for his talents, and gratitude for the attention he paid to one whom she believed to be so much his inferior. When, therefore, they parted at the beginning of the long vacation, though the pain they felt at doing so was enough to have opened the eyes of most to their relative position, they would have said, with a clear conscience, that they were not "in love" with each other.

The long vacation was spent by Ferdinand in making a short tour on the Continent with his tutor. When he returned to Cambridge, in October, of course his first day's occupation was to gallop over to Vere Park. Making to himself the excuse that the day was chilly, though as warm a sun was shining as ever lighted up an October landscape, he spared not his good steed, and muttering some observation about its being "out of condition," to the groom who took the bridle of the panting, dripping animal, he rushed into



the house, almost knocking over the servant, who was intending to announce his name, and stood in the presence of Miss De Vere. Beautiful he had always thought her; but her beauty had so developed itself and increased during the five months of his absence, that he was perfectly astounded; he felt that it was not the same Louisa that he had left, but another more perfect still, in whose presence his usual ready wit deserted him, and he felt as abashed and confounded as a school-boy. He positively found the presence of Mrs. De Vere, who shortly entered the room, an actual relief; and it was not for some days that he could bring himself to feel at ease in their society, as he used to do.

The winter now drew on; there were no more walks in the shrubberies, no evening strolls after dinner; and, in fact, the whole tenor of the life at Vere Park was very different to what it had been in the summer. The more obstacles, however, that there were to his enjoyment of

Louisa's society, the more did he feel how necessary that society was to his happiness, and the truth that he was desperately in love, began to dawn more and more vividly upon him. Mr. De Vere, too, who had not been in parliament for some time, was now re-elected, and they were to go to town shortly after Christmas, where Miss De Vere was to "come out," and go through the ordeal of the London season. To Ferdinand this seemed insupportable : to leave her in May was a trial ; but then he left her in her father's quiet place in the country, feeling pretty sure that no one would interfere with him ere his return ; and, besides, the trial of parting is never so great to those who *go*, as to those who *stay* ; the former have all the excitement of novelty, and are spared the melancholy routine of going through the same occupations *alone*, which had formerly been shared together. He had, therefore, probably felt far less than she had at their former parting. But *now*——

she, the beautiful, the fascinating, was to leave him, to be exposed to all the homage which her beauty and powers of fascination would be so sure to attract. Would she not soon learn to forget him, and all that they had been to each other, and surrender herself to some one far more qualified, as he fancied, to gain her affections? For now he could no longer disguise from himself the truth—he was madly, desperately in love; but then the important question presented itself, what was he to do? Could he hope to marry her? and if not, was it right to gain her affections, and possibly ruin her peace of mind. To the first, the answer was simple enough; situated as he was at present, he could not marry her; the second, as he could not answer it so easily, he only answered so far as to determine to exert enough control over his feelings to avoid making any positive declaration before the De Veres left Vere Park and went to London, which they did at the end of January.

When the return of the long vacation set him free to escape to town, and once more to behold her of whom he had thought ceaselessly during the interval, he found her, as he had expected, admired, courted, surrounded by a fluttering circle of gay admirers, all devoted to her service. During the period of their separation he had reasoned himself into the conviction, that it was worse than foolish, nay, that it was positively wicked, for him, a younger son, without means or expectations of means, of maintaining a wife, to endeavour to gain the affections of any girl, much more of one who had been nursed in the lap of luxury, and whose father, he was well aware, would never consent to her forming an alliance which possessed no greater advantages than those that he could offer. He resolved, therefore, that, when he saw her in town, he would carefully abstain from any attempt at being more to her than a common acquaintance. It would, perhaps, have been

wiser, under the circumstances, to have avoided meeting her at all ; but this he persuaded himself would be impossible, without withdrawing himself so much from society as to attract more attention than he wished. He accordingly went into the world as usual, and, as they moved much in the same set, constantly met her ; but, in pursuance of his virtuous resolutions, his manner towards her was so cold as to excite both pain and resentment in the bosom of the young lady, who, to say the truth, had been counting the days till his return to town should procure her the enjoyment of his society. In retaliation, she assumed a manner to him as cold as his own ; he conceived that her head had been turned by the adulation by which she was surrounded, and that she no longer valued his friendship ; forgetting, as men constantly will forget under similar circumstances, that her manner was but the reflection of his own.

Thus, then, the season of that year

passed away, without being a source of much enjoyment either to Ferdinand or Louisa; and when the latter returned to Vere Park, she could not repress a sigh at the thought of the difference between the reality of the pleasures of the London season, and the picture that she had formed of them in her own mind previously.

In the mean time, all the anxieties that had been excited in Mrs. De Vere's mind, respecting the danger of a too great intimacy with Ferdinand, had been quite allayed by the extreme "propriety" of the young people's behaviour in town; and it was therefore with unfeigned earnestness that, when Ferdinand returned to Cambridge in October, she pressed him to resume his visits to Vere Park. The temptation to Ferdinand, in spite of all that had passed, was far too strong to be resisted; his horse's head was again frequently turned in its usual direction, and once more in the country, among the old

associations that surrounded them, both he and Miss De Vere insensibly fell into their old intimacy, without any formal explanation of their late coolness, which, as it had never amounted to a quarrel, presented no excuse either for requiring or granting an explanation. It was too disagreeable a subject for either of them to dwell upon much in their own minds ; and they gave themselves up once more to the enjoyment of the present, an enjoyment now far more dangerous than ever ; inasmuch as one, at all events, of the parties was fully conscious of his passion, and the suspicions of Mrs. De Vere, the only person who could have placed any check upon their proceedings, had been lulled to sleep by the occurrences of the spring.

In the following January Ferdinand took his degree, being privileged, as a nobleman's son, to do so at the expiration of two years and a half of residence. His father and sister being away from home,

When he had pressed him to pay a visit of some duration to Fern Park—an offer which he had not the moral courage to refuse. Thrown together now more closely than ever, all the little misundestandings of the young completely forgotten, Ferdinand and Louise became more and more deeply enmeshed in the web that they were weaving around themselves. Twelve months hence, Ferdinand had seen the path of duty clear before him. He had begun to walk in it, he had not had courage to persevere, and now this path was no longer open to him. He had wandered from the track, and knew not how to recover it. Then he had no reason to suppose that any happiness but his own was involved in the course that he should pursue. Now he could not avoid seeing that the artless girl reciprocated his attachment; and he could not therefore be sure that the same course which was, undoubtedly, his path of duty before, viz., a total or partial withdrawal



of himself from the sphere of her influence, could be equally that of duty *now*. He might be justified in sacrificing his own happiness—but might he also sacrifice hers? and had he a right, now that he had won her heart, to leave her to forget him if she could—to die for him if she could *not*. On every side he saw nothing but a series of perplexities; it seemed as if he could in no way do right. So it always is with us when once we have wilfully strayed from the right path. And yet, amidst all his troubles and difficulties, his uncertainty as to what he should do for the present, his anxious misgivings as to the future, he felt a pride and a happiness in the consciousness of being loved, that more, far more than counterbalanced every other feeling, and he felt that he could not sacrifice the enjoyment of that consciousness for one day, to ensure any other kind of happiness for a whole life.

This period of intoxicating excitement,

however, came to a close without any further declaration on his part, than a tacit understanding, which had sprung up between them, that they were all in all to each other. They were not, however, so far engaged, that Ferdinand could contemplate, without great alarm, the return of the assiduous attentions with which he knew Louisa would be beset on her appearance in London. Had he been so, he might have been able to have observed a greater caution, and avoided paying marked attention in public ; but he could not endure seeing her the object of attention from any other. He rushed on madly in his career, and his manners assumed so great an appearance of devotion, that the world, always prone to gossip, more especially before Easter, when it has not so much to occupy its attention, speedily gave out that the marriage between the Honourable Ferdinand Castleton and the beautiful and accomplished Miss De Vere was quite an arranged affair. These rumours were, of

course, not slow in reaching the ears of Lord Stapleford, who spoke seriously to his son on the subject. Ferdinand at once told his father that it was but too true that he was devotedly attached to Miss De Vere; and added, that although no formal engagement had taken place, he could not deny that he believed his passion to be returned. Lord Stapleford at once said that the matter could not rest thus, and he took an opportunity of speaking to Mr. De Vere on the subject; stating what he would do for his son, and sounding him as to the possibility of managing for the young people somehow or other. Mr. De Vere, however, was furious; declared that he never could, would, or should give his consent to his daughter's marriage with a beggarly younger son, and, in fine, said that, if Ferdinand did not quit town immediately, his daughter should. On hearing this, Ferdinand had no choice left him but to obey the mandate, however painful; and without even the consolation

of a parting interview with his Louisa, he started at once for the Continent. Miss De Vere was, however, even more to be pitied than he was. Condemned to the eternal round of parties, for which she had no spirits, and of attentions from others, while her thoughts were wholly given to him, she suffered from that weary sickness of the heart experienced by those who have to bear up against sorrow with a smiling countenance, and feign a cheerfulness which they do not feel. At last, however, her health began visibly to fail under her struggles ; and her mother, who had sympathized deeply with her sufferings, in vain implored Mr. De Vere to modify his edict, and to give some hope, however slight and remote, for them to live upon. But all had no effect, and Louisa's cheek grew paler and paler, and her form became thinner and thinner, until the party to which Lord Stapleford belonged suddenly and unexpectedly found themselves once more in office. Lord

Stapleford had an important part in the new government, and having always taken a lively interest, not only in the fate of his son, who continued to assure him of his undiminished affection for Miss De Vere, but also in that of the lovely and interesting girl, whose only fault was, that she had appreciated Ferdinand's good qualities but too well, he induced Mr. De Vere, by the offer of a post for himself, and the hope that "something might turn up" for Ferdinand, to consent to an engagement between the young people. The excess of their joy may be imagined; Ferdinand was permitted to return, and fortune seemed now to smile upon him indeed, for, in a few months, the desired place was obtained, which, with the handsome allowance received from his father, enabled him to offer his beloved Louisa a home, which, if not replete with luxuries, was, at any rate, not devoid of the necessaries of life.

Words cannot paint the joy, the happiness of the wedded pair. The career of

their love had been an eventful one. Joy, grief, jealousy, anxiety, hope and despair, had each added their quota of fuel to the flame, that had been so early kindled. They had been tried—they had been found true. They had now nought to fear—they knew each other well, and every day of their wedded life seemed to draw them closer to each other—for the more they saw of the inner workings of each other's minds, the more did they find to love and admire—the more intensely did they rejoice that they had been permitted to become one—the more delightful did the task become of cheering one another on their road to eternity. The first year of their marriage was indeed spent in joy, such as is seldom the lot of mortals in this world. And now they were looking forward to the advent of a being, who was to rivet still closer the chains that bound them to each other. This was to put the climax to their earthly happiness. But the more brilliant the sunshine, the darker is the

cloud, that is even now hurrying across the heavens.

When the time for her confinement arrived, Mrs. Castleton was safely delivered of a daughter, and for the first few days all seemed to do well. Before, however, a week had elapsed, an attack of fever supervened, against which her frame, enfeebled by the excitement caused by the conflicting emotions of anxiety, despair, and joy, to which she had so lately been a prey, was ill-calculated to bear up. After a struggle of two or three days, the unequal conflict was brought to a close, and Ferdinand Castleton from the happiest of mortals became the most miserable. Over the first moments of his misery we will draw a veil. The reader's imagination may well conceive its intensity. To be deprived at so short a notice, of a treasure, purchased so recently at the expense of so much grief and anxiety, and of which every day that had passed had but served to enhance the value, was indeed a trial

of a nature which happily few are called upon to endure. For a time he was prostrated by the blow, but he soon recalled to his mind that he had still duties to perform, and that it would be sinful in the eyes of God to waste his whole life in vain regrets for the irrecoverable past.

His resolution was soon formed. He would enter the church, and, in devoting his whole life to the service of God, he would find an occupation the most likely to distract his thoughts from dwelling on the earthly happiness that he had once hoped would be his ; while, at the same time, he would endeavour to fit himself the more surely for attaining to eternal happiness hereafter. The disposal of his child was a matter of some anxiety to him, but he finally determined that he would bring her up himself, that he might not be deprived of the only consolation now left to him on earth. The family living, which Lord Stapleford had always wished him to hold, became vacant shortly afterwards,



but Ferdinand refused to take it, and by so doing to disappoint the young man, to whom it had been conditionally promised, and who was anxiously expecting the presentation to it. His father therefore obtained for him a living in the gift of the crown, which, though small in income, was admirably suited to his requirements. And here he busied himself in the exercise of his profession and the education of his darling child, and succeeded, to a degree which surprised himself, in driving from his mind the unavailing sorrow for the past.

Now, however, he had exposed himself to a severe trial, and it had proved too hard for him. He had never re-visited Cambridge since he took his degree, save once, and then he was accompanied by his darling Louisa. In his earlier days often had he leant over that bridge, where he was now standing, and pondered on her, on his feelings for her, on her feelings for him. Often had he come there alone in the

evening and revolved in his mind all the peculiarities of his situation. At various times various emotions had filled his mind. Now joy, now hope, now grief, now despair, but always in some way connected with her ; and when, on the occasion when they were at Cambridge together, he had brought her to that bridge, he had told her of all that he had thought there, and had contrasted all those variable feelings, which he at different times had experienced, with the unclouded happiness he was then enjoying.

Now how dreadful, how very dreadful, was the contrast between that unclouded happiness and his present feelings. The recollection of all that she had been to him rushed with overpowering vehemence upon his mind. The lapse of time seemed as nothing. His feelings were as fresh as though he had stood there with her but yesterday ; he thought of nothing but of how deeply he had loved her, and how

irretrievably he had lost her. “Alas, alas !” he said to himself, “how little did I think when we stood here together now more than fourteen years ago, having, as we conceived, just entered on a long career of earthly happiness,—how little did either of us think that, ere many months were past, she should be laid in the silent tomb, and I, widowed and broken hearted, should feel that all my joy in this world lay with her in that tomb. How little did I think that, exultingly as I was contrasting my then sensations with those with which at other times I had gazed from the same spot, that the next contrast would be of a still more startling and overwhelming description; and that the next time I was destined to stand on this bridge, it would be, as aforetime, alone—but not, as aforetime, cheered by the rays of hope, which, though they shine with greater or less brilliancy, never, while there is life, entirely desert us, but, as a lone pilgrim

in the world to whom it can bring no more joys." "But I am wrong," he added, "to think thus. True it has pleased the Almighty to visit me with one of the severest of his scourges, but still am I not wrong to say or to think that I have no joys left? Is not the recollection of duties fulfilled, duties in the holiest of callings, —of souls by my humble means brought near to God, it may perchance be, saved from eternal perdition; and the devoted attachment of my precious child, the living image of her sainted mother; are not these joys which still remain to me even in this world? Unquestionably they are, and humbly do I ask thy forgiveness, O God, for having in my thoughts murmured at Thine allwise decrees; and earnestly do I beseech Thee to grant me grace and strength so to bring up my child, that when my own eyes are closing in the sleep of death, I may feel assured that I am to meet her, as well as her mother, in the

land to which I shall be departing." With this pious prayer, and turning, as was his wont, his thoughts from the past to the future, he gathered his gown around him, left the bridge, and proceeded slowly to his apartments.

## CHAPTER III.

THE rectory of Shelbridge, which was now held by Ferdinand Castleton, was situated in one of the most romantic spots in one of the loveliest districts in the west of England. The parish was rambling and extensive, and the population scattered, so that, although they amounted in number to upwards of a thousand, there was nothing worthy the name of a village, except the few houses which were grouped around the church itself. At some little distance from the Rectory House, a silvery stream, which turned a mill and abounded

in trout, passed through the village. The Rectory House had probably in former days stood on its banks, either in or close by the village ; but the taste of some prior incumbent had led him to prefer a higher situation, and the modern house, which now enjoyed that title, was situated on a knoll, which rose gracefully up, at the distance of something like half a mile. From this spot the eye took in a landscape of peculiar loveliness. A field or two of broken park-like ground sloped down to the river, whose meanderings could be plainly traced for some distance ; the friendly mill-dam, by keeping the waters permanently high, rendering the river a greater object to the eye than it is in many cases, where it pursues its course between two precipitous banks, which shut it out from the view of all who are not actually standing upon them. On the banks of the stream, and full in view of the parsonage, stood the little collection of houses that formed the village, clustering, as we

have said, around the venerable church, whose hoary ivy-clad tower peered out from among the trees in which it was embowered; an ancient yew, which for centuries had stood in the churchyard, forming a prominent feature in the view. Beyond the river again, the ground rose abruptly into steep and rugged hills, covered with heather, and marked with the sinuous track of one or two roads that conducted travellers to the bosom of this sequestered valley. Behind the fantastic outlines of the tops of these hills, were to be seen the blue summits of some far more distant, which might almost be dignified by the name of mountains.

The side of the valley on which the rectory stood was covered with wood, which, though cleared away between the rectory and the river, descended again nearly to the latter on both sides; and the windings of the valley were so great, that, both to the right and to the left, the view was closed in by the apparent junc-



tion of the two sides. Some miles lower down, the stream made its escape from its close confinement, and turning at right angles to its former course, hastened to join the waters of the Severn, and some idea may be formed of the continuity of the valley, when it is known that it was stated by an eminent geologist, and one who knew the country well, that were that opening to be closed, the waters of the stream would be unable to find another outlet, and would be dammed back for upwards of twenty miles.

Close by the knoll on which the parsonage stood, the hill-side was cleft into a most picturesque gorge by the action of a sparkling streamlet, which in the lapse of ages had cut its way through the solid rock, carving it, in doing so, into the most grotesque outlines, and descending swiftly, now in cascades of varying heights, and now in leaping, rushing rapids from the summit of the wooded hills to the larger river at the bottom. The pleasant mur-

mur of this streamlet, mingled with the sweet perfume of the flowers that filled the garden, extending down to its banks, were wafted through the open windows into the drawing-room of the parsonage, where sat a young girl of apparently thirteen or fourteen years of age, who, though endeavouring to occupy herself with a book, was evidently unable to fix her attention for two consecutive minutes on its contents, but was perpetually looking up, and listening with that eager expression of countenance which denotes that the mind is more than ordinarily anxious, and that we are ardently expecting the arrival of some friend, whose appearance will be hailed with earnest and heartfelt welcome.

Louisa Castleton, for that was the name of the young lady who was thus employed, had in fact at this time attained her fourteenth year. She, like her mother, was rather below the middle size, and she gave promise of possessing her mother's unrivalled symmetry of form, though of course

at that early age its beauty was as yet undeveloped. Her hair, less absolutely black than her mother's, would still have been termed so by a casual observer ; though to those who paid more attention, and who were fortunate enough to catch it in a particular light, threads of the richest auburn might be seen mingled with others as dark as the raven's wing. Her eyebrows were already prominently marked, and arched in the most regular curve, and her long dark eyelashes shaded eyes of the most heavenly blue. Her complexion, naturally fair, was somewhat embrowned by exposure to the weather, which, however, had given it a tint so glowing, that none who gazed could wish it otherwise. Her transparent skin allowed her cheeks to mantle warmly with the rich blood that flowed through her veins, and gave to her full lips a rosy red, that served to set off the brilliant whiteness of her teeth, while her delicate little nose, the least in the world *retroussé*, gave to her

whole countenance the most charmingly piquante *spirituelle* expression that can be imagined. In fact, a more expressive countenance cannot be conceived. Her blue eyes, when suffused with tears, could express the deepest sorrow for herself, or sympathy with others; while at other times, aided and assisted by her rosy mouth, they could tell of the lightest of hearts and the gayest of spirits, and this was their more ordinary mood, for in truth hers had been a happy childhood, and she had thus far escaped her fair share of the misfortunes and annoyances which await the majority of mankind even in youth.

We have seen that, immediately after his wife's death, Ferdinand had insisted on having the sole charge of the yet unconscious infant. Mrs. De Vere had rather wished that, for some time at least, it should be confided to her care, but Ferdinand had been firm, and she had yielded to his wishes. He was fortunate in gain-

ing an experienced nurse, who brought it through the ills of infancy with great success ; but, warned by the example of his sister, who had suffered so much from her governess, he determined, if possible, to dispense with that appendage, and undertake himself the whole of his daughter's education. For this he was, in fact, more fitted than most men. He had, in the first place, a thorough grammatical knowledge of his own language. He was well acquainted with French and Italian, and well read in history, ancient and modern. Devotedly fond of music, his own mother had in his childhood given him instruction sufficient to enable him to play very tolerably on the pianoforte ; so that he was not unfitted to teach most of what young ladies usually learn, with the exception of the mysteries of the needle. Here, however, he found the nurse a most able and efficient preceptress, under whose tuition the young lady acquired a knowledge of sewing, stitching, hemming, seaming, whip-

ping, running, felling, and herring-boning, which would have qualified her even for the situation of a mantua-maker's apprentice.

The young Louisa was endued by nature with a most amiable disposition, which indeed she had inherited both from her father and her mother, but Ferdinand was well aware how far astray the best of natural dispositions would lead us, if allowed to follow their own bent ; and he had taken the most careful pains to bring up his daughter in a constant state of watchfulness over herself, and with an unceasing feeling of responsibility towards God. He felt that, in the relation in which they stood to each other, his own example was worth a thousand precepts, and therefore, though always watchful over himself, he took pains to be specially so in the presence of his child ; and during the course of fourteen years, he could hardly lay to his charge a single instance of his having lost his temper in his inter-

course with her. Happy, then, had been her childhood, and unbounded was the affection with which she regarded her father, whose return she was now so anxiously expecting. "He said he would be here by four o'clock," she said to herself, "and it must now be nearly six, for I see the reflection of the sun shining on the church windows, and I know we never can see that from this room till towards that hour. How stupid of me to forget to wind the clock last Sunday. It has stopped now, and I have no way of knowing exactly what the time is." Then she again tried to read, but in a minute or two laid down her book.

"I must ring, and ask nurse," she said, as she touched the handle of the bell rope and gave two decided rings, not, perhaps, so much from the mere desire to know the exact hour, as from the longing she felt for some companion to share her anxiety, and, if possible, suggest some plausible cause for the non-arrival of her parent.

Her summons was speedily answered by the appearance of the respectable old lady, who, though still called "nurse," now fulfilled the duties of housekeeper in Mr. Castleton's establishment. "Pray, nurse, can you tell me what o'clock it is? This clock has stopped."

"It wants just five minutes of six, Miss," replied the nurse, pulling a large silver timepiece out of the depths of her pocket, a place which nurses, time out of mind, have agreed to consider as the safest for the preservation of their watches, though to ordinary mortals it appears almost a miracle that they do not get broken to atoms at every turn.

"And papa said he should be here at four," observed Louisa, dolefully.

"Yes, Miss, and your papa is so very regular always, that I should never have thought of his not being home to his time."

"Perhaps he was detained in town on business, and not able to come by the train he intended."



“ Perhaps so, Miss, only I thought you told me that your papa was to come up from Cambridge yesterday, and only sleep in town, so as to be ready to start the first thing in the morning, and that he had done all his business before he went to Cambridge.”

“ Well, nurse, I am sure I can’t think why he doesn’t come,” said poor Louisa, beginning to feel very miserable.

“ It’s all along of them horrid railways, Miss ; one can never be sure now-a-days of arriving alive at one’s journey’s end. I am sure I would not go in one, Miss ; no, not if you was to give me a hundred golden sovereigns.”

“ Well, but you know nurse, a great many hundreds of people do travel every day by these railways, and arrive quite safe at last, and papa himself has often been before.”

“ Oh yes, Miss, of course I know that ; but you know, Miss, the proverb, ‘ the pitcher that went to the well,’—you know

what I mean, Miss ; and I think it positively wicked, that I do, to go and trust one's life in that way to a great iron monster like them steam engines, that ain't got no sense. If a horse runs away you know, Miss, there may be some one to stop it ; but nothing can stop them engines if they runs away, and as fast as they goes they must be always a running away, I should think ; and as for people arriving safe, I am sure, Miss, it's more than they do always. Look at Jem Brooks, down in the village, a cripple for life along of them nasty things ; and Tom Taylor, he's never been right in his head since he got what the doctors call a compunction of the brain ; and there's Mrs. White, over at Swinford, she lost her husband and son both at once, though to be sure that was not a railway exactly, but it was a steam-boat that went down in the river somewhere, and that's all the same. But Lor, Miss," she continued, " seeing that poor Louisa was now crying in real earnest, I

am sure I did not mean to frighten you so. I daresay your dear papa is all safe and well, and has not been able to drive home from the station quite so quick as usual ; for I saw John putting the ponies into the little phaeton, and they seemed to go skeary-like, as if they had not had much exercise while your papa's been away, and so perhaps your papa's been driving home very steadily, because of them steep hills he has to come down, and so, perhaps, it will be slow and sure after all, Miss, and he'll be all the safer from being a little later."

This last topic, however, did not bring much comfort to Louisa's mind, who knew well that the ponies, when not in regular exercise, were uncommonly skittish, and also that the road her father had to traverse was by no means an easy one. She had, however, been so accustomed to be drawn in safety by the ponies, that the idea of danger from them had not occurred to her mind till thus presented to it by her

nurse's well-meant attempt at consolation. Now, however, she was thoroughly frightened, and the more so, as she felt, that whatever had happened, she could do nothing either to assist her father, or to discover the cause of his absence. It is astonishing how this feeling of helplessness adds to our fear and anxiety. If there is anything to be done, any scope for action, the mind becomes interested and absorbed, and feelings of alarm have little power to prey upon it; but when once we feel that we can do nothing more—that we must sit with our hands before us and await the event, the mind, unoccupied save with anxiety, loses its elasticity, and we become a prey to the most violent attacks of nervousness. This was now the case with Louisa Castleton, as she sat there with her nurse, anxiously watching the shadow thrown by the setting sun creep up the opposite hill, until finally it was entirely darkened, and the summits only of those more distant hills that we mentioned, still

reflected the brilliancy of his rays. Louisa felt as if a similar darkness had been stealing over her soul, and one only point still remained illumined by the rays of hope. She bethought her that she would betake herself in prayer to Him who overruleth all things, and to whose footstool she had been taught by her father to approach at all times, and not to fear that the occasion was too slight, for that there was no event that ever took place in this world without His especial Providence ordaining it ; and that He who cares for the sparrows would assuredly listen to her prayers if made in a proper spirit, and would answer them as seemed best to His infinite wisdom. Calling, therefore, her nurse to her side, she knelt and prayed earnestly that God would preserve her father, and restore him speedily to her arms.

A ring at the door bell made her think that her prayers had been instantaneously responded to. She rushed to the door, threw it open, and was on the point of

flinging herself into the arms of the gentleman who was outside, when, recoiling with a start, she said in a tone of the deepest disappointment, "Oh, Mr. Wentworth! I thought you were papa." It is possible that a slight tinge of vexation, at the tone in which these words were spoken, affected also Mr. Wentworth, for it was in rather a cold manner that he answered, "No, Miss Castleton, it is only my humble self. I wish to see Mr. Castleton, and presumed to stop, as I passed, and enquire if he was arrived."

Louisa, however, was far too much occupied with her own subjects for anxiety to perceive anything unusual. She begged Mr. Wentworth to come in, under the pretext of waiting a little to see if her father would return, but, in reality, greatly gratified at having got an auditor to whom she could pour forth her tale of sorrow and anxiety, with more hope of receiving consolation than was afforded by her old nurse, who had dutifully vanished at the arrival of the visitor.

Mr. Wentworth, whose unexpected appearance had caused such a disappointment to Louisa, was Mr. Castleton's curate; whom he employed, not so much from any positive necessity for his doing so, for, for many years he had managed the parish single-handed, as to oblige Mr. Wentworth's father, who was an old friend of the Castleton family, and who had been very anxious that his son should commence his clerical career under the guidance of so excellent a parish priest as Ferdinand was universally allowed to be. One other reason also influenced him in yielding to this proposal, namely, that he felt his voice was not so strong as it used to be, and that he was not able, without great fatigue, to go through his Sunday duty, comprising as it did attendance at the Sunday-school, without assistance. For these reasons, therefore, he yielded to the elder Mr. Wentworth's solicitations, and consented to "give a title," with a small stipend, to his son William, who on his part was

extremely grateful for the kindness, and earnestly anxious to profit as much as possible by the opportunity thus afforded him. He had now been established in his curacy for about six months, and a warm friendship having sprung up between him and his rector, he was to be found nearly as often in or about the parsonage, as at his own humble lodgings in the village.

In person he was tall and slight, with a countenance which, though not strikingly handsome, was pleasing and amiable. An affectionate heart and strong principles were, perhaps, more prominent characteristics of his mind than wit or talents. The poor loved him, and the rich respected him; and it is not therefore surprising that Ferdinand congratulated himself on the coadjutor he had found, and sought to draw still closer the ties of intimacy that bound them together. By the time that the servant, who had been busying herself with bringing candles and shutting the shutters, had done fidgetting about the



room, the momentary vexation which Louisa's extreme tone of disappointment at seeing *him* had aroused in the young man's heart, had completely passed away ; and he reproached himself for having been annoyed at what was after all so extremely natural. Moving therefore to Louisa, and observing that her eyes were red with crying, he said, in a voice whose tones expressed the deepest sympathy, "I fear, Miss Castleton, that you are much alarmed at the non-appearance of your father. At what time did you expect him to arrive?"

"At about four, he *said*," answered Louisa, almost unable to command her voice.

"Indeed! and it is now nearly eight," rejoined he. "If he had come by the next train, even, he should have been here before this."

"Oh! yes, I am sure, I'm sure, something has happened to him ; and I don't know what to do."

"I fear I can be of little service," said

he, now indeed deeply interested ; “ But stay ; I will tell you what I will do, with your permission, Miss Castleton. I will mount your father’s horse, and ride over to the station, and inquire if the train has come in ; or if any accident has happened to it.”

“ Oh ! that will be so kind of you,” said Louisa, her eyes brightening as she spoke ; “ but I don’t know how it can be managed, after all, for John is gone with the ponyphaeton, and there is no one to saddle the horse for you.”

“ Never mind that,” replied he ; “ it will not be the first time I have saddled a horse for myself ; and Bay Momus and I are not altogether strangers. So, adieu, Miss Castleton. I will lose no time, but be off at once.”

**CHAPTER IV.**

**MR. WENTWORTH** found little difficulty in procuring the key of the stable, and saddling the horse ; which, as he had hinted, he had often before this been permitted to ride by the kindness of Mr. Castleton. It was not, however, without some misgivings that he took this decided step of riding a friend's horse twelve miles of a bad, hilly road to the railway station, in the middle of the night ; merely for the purpose of inquiring whether or not the train, by which the said friend was expected to come, had arrived in safety. He

thought of the thousand-and-one events that might have happened to detain Mr. Castleton in London ; of the much greater probability that something had occurred to prevent him from starting, than that any harm should have befallen the train. He thought too, that, supposing any thing had delayed the train, the probabilities were that no one was hurt ; or that, if any one was hurt, it was highly improbable that it should be Mr. Castleton. In fact, so strongly did all these reasons against his expedition present themselves to his mind, that, when the horse was saddled and bridled, he stood some seconds irresolute whether to mount, or to return to the house and endeavour to reason Miss Castleton out of her anxiety. But the thought of that fair young face overspread with grief, and the recollection of the tone in which she had said, " It will be so kind of you," inspired him with fresh resolution, and knowing the ardent affection of Ferdinand for his daughter, he felt sure that he

would not blame him for doing all in his power to soothe her anxiety, and that he would not grudge his horse a night ride, to save his daughter from a night of sleeplessness and heart-ache. Springing, therefore, into the saddle, and adjusting the stirrups to his own length, he rode out of the stable-yard, and turned the horse's head towards the town of W——, where was the nearest railway station.

The road, though hilly, was tolerably direct ; and though the night was rather dark, as there was no moon, and a bank of clouds had crept over half the heavens, Wentworth experienced little difficulty in finding his way ; and knowing that Miss Castleton would be counting the minutes till he returned, he pressed the good horse on as fast as the steepness of the hills could admit. The road ran for some distance parallel with the river, along the side of the hill that bounded the valley, but it was unable to follow a level course, in consequence of the hill side

being constantly intersected by narrow gorges, caused by small streamlets rushing down from the top, similar to that which we have described as existing close to the parsonage. It was, therefore, impossible for him to proceed as fast as his wishes prompted him, with any regard to the safety, not so much of himself, as of his horse—it being really dangerous to ride fast *down* the steep little pitches; and though he occasionally indulged in galloping up on the opposite side, he was obliged to consider that he had possibly a twenty-four mile ride before him, and that he must not task the strength of his horse too much in the early part of his journey. He had, therefore, plenty of time for reflection, and truly his meditations were of a very mingled character. Sometimes he considered the probable cause of Ferdinand's non-appearance—but, as we have said before, so many causes occurred to him for it, all of them consistent with his perfect safety, that he did not terrify him-

self very much with that. More often he caught himself dwelling on the expressive countenance of the young girl he had just left—her eager wish to meet him—her disappointment at finding he was not her father—her anguish of mind at his non-arrival—and her gratitude to himself for his undertaking this as he thought somewhat Quixotic expedition. How much she loves him, he thought ; how delightful it must be to be so loved—by such a charming little creature ! He thought, too, how delightful it would be to bring her back satisfactory tidings ; to see her bright eyes sparkle with joy. Occasionally he thought of his own prospects, the younger son of a moderately rich country gentlemen. He hoped some day to have a living, but had not the remotest idea where it was to come from. But he was very well contented for the present to be where he was, and so dismissed the subject from his mind ; and pressing his horse's side, urged him on at

a rapid pace, over a part of the road that was rather more level than ordinary. On passing through a turnpike, he inquired if Mr. Castleton's carriage had been through, and was informed that the groom had driven it through towards W——, some hours before, and that it had not returned. The road, now crossing the river by a bridge, passed out of the valley by the same opening through which the river made its escape; and from this point to the station, its course lay across a wide open plain. The night was now so dark, that Wentworth could with difficulty see the road in front of his horse's ears, but he knew that it was almost impossible to miss it, and galloped along, therefore, at a rapid pace, anxious to arrive at his journey's end, and to learn, as he fully expected, that the train had arrived at its usual hour, but without Mr. Castleton, who would, therefore, unquestionably have been, from some unknown cause, detained in town. His consternation, therefore, may be ima-



gined when, on enquiring of the station master, if the train due at half-past two had arrived safe, and if Mr. Castleton had come by it; the answer was in the affirmative, coupled with the intelligence that Mr. Castleton's phaeton had been in waiting, and that Mr. Castleton had driven off for home immediately. Wentworth's tidings that Ferdinand had not arrived, and that he had come direct from Shelbridge to inquire for him, caused equal astonishment to the railway officials, one of whom remarked that he supposed some accident had happened, as the ponies seemed very fresh when they started.

"But," continued he, "I don't know how that could be either, sir, for if anything had happened, you must have seen or heard something of it, as you came along the road."

"Is there no other way by which he could have gone?"

"Well, sir, I don't rightly know myself, for I am a stranger, and have not been

long in these parts, but I will inquire if there are any of the men here as knows the country well, and, if there be, they'll tell you all about it, sir."

The man proceeded to make his enquiries, leaving Wentworth in a most unenviable state of mind. His confidence had been so great, that he should find that nothing had occurred, that his present disappointment, in finding that there really was cause for alarm, was proportionably severe. He still clung to the hope, however, that there was some other road by which Ferdinand could have gone, which he had perhaps pursued as being safer, though more circuitous, and where, perhaps, some trifling accident to the carriage or horses had delayed him for an hour or two, as his own experience told him might very possibly be the case. While pondering thus, the time seemed interminable, till the porter returned bringing with him a rustic countryman, who had been driving a carrier's waggon to

the station, and who boasted that he knew every square inch of the country, for twenty miles round and better.

“Well, my friend,” said Wentworth, “I understand that you know this country better than any of us. Pray, tell me, is there any road by which Mr. Castleton can have gone to Shelbridge, except the one by Penridge and Steepton, by which I came.”

“No, sir, none as I knows on; leastways none for a gentleman’s carriage. There be a way surely, by Morevall, but that ain’t no ways fit for a carriage, and besides it would be a long way round; for you see, sir, you must go up to Morevall and then on to Stanton, in order to cross the river between Stanton and Shelbridge, for there beant no other bridge except that and the one as you came over, sir.”

Impossible as it seemed that Ferdinand should have taken this road, it appeared the only possible way of accounting for his complete disappearance; so

Wentworth hastily made up his mind that he would return that way.

“Can I find my way back to Shelbridge by that road you speak of?” said he to his informant.

“Well, sir, it is not that easy a road to find. You must turn off just afore you get to the bridge, and keep along the right bank of the river, and then you’ll take the first turn to the right, and the second to the left, and then you’ll be careful not to take the first to the right again, sir, for it leads only to the brow of the hill, where the gentlefolks go sometimes, sir, to look at the view as they calls it ; and then—”

“Stop, stop, my good man,” said Wentworth, who saw that this road would be by no means easy to find in broad daylight, and that now in the middle of a dark night it would be utterly impossible. “I shall never find this road to-night ; I am afraid I must give it up.” And he paused irresolute. What was he to do

next ? To return to Shelbridge by the way he had come; and to tell Louisa Castleton that the only tidings he had heard of her father rendered it more than ever probable that he had met with some serious accident. He could not endure even the thought of the misery that he should thus be called upon to witness. The only other alternative was to engage the rude boor to act as his guide, and conduct him over the rugged and difficult road he had been describing. This was no agreeable course to pursue. The distance to Shelbridge by this route was at least fifteen or sixteen miles. His companion being on foot would entail his proceeding at a snail's pace the whole of the way. The night was pitchy dark, and the clouds which had been gathering ever since the sun went down, were now beginning to discharge their contents in a drizzling rain, which gave every promise of increasing and continuing throughout the night. At one time the thought of putting up his

horse, getting a bed for the night at a neighbouring town, and resuming his search in the morning, occurred to him. But he did not entertain it for an instant. He felt too deeply for poor Louisa's suspense and anxiety of mind ; and he also that, if any accident had happened on this unfrequented road that the countryman had described, his friend might absolutely be perishing for want of assistance. He saw, therefore, that he must go on with his search in spite of the manifold inconveniences that attended it ; and turning to the countryman, he inquired for a certain consideration, he would consent to act as guide along the road he had named. The man, to enhance the price of his services, drew a picture of the dangers and difficulties of the route, which was anything but satisfactory to his employer. But at last, in consideration of a sum larger than he would in ordinary course have earned in a fortnight, he consented to undertake the office of guide, and

bring Wentworth by the road he had spoken of to Shelbridge, where, however, he held out no hopes of arriving before daylight.

Once more, then, did Wentworth mount his horse, and as the road was the same as that by which he had come as far as the bridge, and his guide was of a taciturn disposition, he enjoyed the opportunity of indulging in his own reflections ; which it must be confessed, were not of a most agreeable description. As the wind came rushing across the open plain which we have described, driving the rain, which was now coming down in torrents, into his face, and making it soak deeper and deeper into his clothes, till he began to think that his very skin was saturated, he was strongly tempted to wish that his fate had not impelled him to Shelbridge parsonage that evening, and that this voyage of discovery had been committed to other hands than his. Perhaps, after all, he said to himself, Castleton is safe at home

by this time, and comfortably seated by his drawing-room fire with his daughter, while I am wandering about here in the wet, looking after him.

Better feelings however prevailed, and, notwithstanding his discomforts, by the time he arrived at the bridge, he had succeeded in convincing himself that he ought to be thankful for having an opportunity thus afforded him, of being of service not only to a fellow-creature, but to one to whom he was bound by ties both of friendship and gratitude. At this point the momentous part of their expedition was to commence. The night was so dark, that even by the aid of the lanthorn, which by prudent foresight he had desired his attendant to carry, Wentworth with difficulty perceived that the main road making a sharp turn to go over the bridge, the cross-road which here joined it, and which they were to follow, was in point of fact a continuation of the straight line in which they had been for some time past advanc-



ing. One or two large stones lying in his path warned Wentworth that by far the most prudent course for him to pursue, under the circumstances, would be to dismount and lead his horse by the bridle,—and he accordingly did so—though it by no means added to the comfort of his journey. There are few greater nuisances than being obliged to lead a horse by the bridle ; but, if to this is added a pouring rain, and a night so dark that one can neither see where oneself or one's horse is about to tread, the annoyance rises to a very high order in the catalogue of disagreeables. His guide moreover held out no hopes of any improvement in the road for many a mile, but rather the contrary. Wentworth thought it impossible that Ferdinand could willingly have followed such a road as this, even in his little open carriage ; and, if the horses had run away with him, they would surely have taken the shortest way home, and would never have gone out of their course

to have faced such a hill as this—he thought, panting with the exertion of clambering up the rocky stony hill, up which they were slowly advancing. He felt, however, that he was in for it, and must now go through with it *coute qui coute*.

But if the ascent was difficult and dangerous, the descent on the other side was far worse. The horse, though a very good one, and surefooted under ordinary circumstances, was now rather tired, and, though unencumbered with any weight on his back, made several severe stumbles, and required all Wentworth's care to keep him on his legs. Wentworth thought it almost impossible that any carriage could have come safely down such a place, and was expressing his opinion to his guide, when, as they were crossing the little stream that intersected the road at the bottom of the hill, he fancied he heard a groan. He stopped and listened, but the rushing noise of the water was the only sound that reached his

ears, and he proceeded. He had not gone, however, many steps, before a cry—this time unmistakeable—attracted his attention. He hallooed in reply, and was answered by a voice apparently proceeding from the midst of the water they had just passed. Hastily taking the lanthorn from his guide, and bidding him hold the horse, he advanced in the direction from which the voice proceeded, and, at length, lying just on the edge of the road and almost in the water, he discovered the groom who had attended Mr. Castleton. On attempting to raise him, he found that the injuries he had sustained, were too severe to permit him to stand—and from pain, cold, and fright, he was so exhausted as hardly to be able to articulate. To obtain, however, intelligence of Mr. Castleton was all important. A little brandy from a flask in the guide's pocket worked wonders towards the loosening of his tongue ; and after a few minutes, he was sufficiently restored to be able to give a

short account of the occurrence that had brought him there. He said that the ponies were very fresh in the morning, so that it had been with some difficulty that he had arrived safely at the station, but that having been baited and rested, and finding their heads turned homewards, they were almost unmanageable from the moment when Mr. Castleton took the reins to drive home—and that, as they were passing over the open level country, they met a coach going rapidly towards the station, at which they took fright and started off at full gallop. The road was level and tolerably good; Mr. Castleton drove well, and John said, that neither he nor his master, at first, apprehended any very serious results from the adventure. Soon, however, they reached the bridge which has been so often mentioned, and it was at once evident, that at the pace at which they were going they would inevitably be upset in turning the sharp corner made by the road, in order to cross it.

Under these circumstances, the only alternative was to keep straight on, and follow the bye road that joined the high road at that point ; and Mr. Castleton fully believed that the steep hill which they would have to encounter, coupled with the fact of their heads being no longer directed homewards, would damp the ardour of the ponies and enable him to bring them to a stand. Up the hill, however, they dashed remorselessly, the little carriage bounding over the huge stones that strewed the way, in a manner that tested the excellence of the springs, while it rendered it extremely difficult for either of the passengers to keep their seats. Arrived at the top, it was evident that the ponies were not likely to stop before they got to the bottom of the next hill, and the peril now became imminent. In safety, however, they reached the stream, when the violent jerk caused by dashing through it threw him, John, completely out, and he fell with such violence on the rough stones

in its bed, that he was only conscious before he became insensible, of seeing his master and the ponies still pursuing their mad career, the former being, as he imagined, saved from falling out by the tight hold that he had of the reins. When he recovered his consciousness, he found that his leg, though he believed it was not broken, was too severely hurt to enable him to move without the most acute pain. He therefore dragged himself a little out of the way, and had fallen into a trance, from which the noise caused by the approach of Wentworth and his companion had aroused him sufficiently to cause him to exert himself a little to make himself heard.

Wentworth expressed his surprise, that as the accident must have happened in broad daylight, some hours before dark, no one had passed by who could have afforded assistance, or, at all events, carried intelligence of the misfortune; but both John and the guide assured him that that road was so little

frequented, that a whole day might elapse without a soul being seen upon it. The consideration now was, what was to be done next. By John's account, it seemed almost impossible that the carriage could have proceeded much further without being upset. And besides, there was no doubt, that, had Ferdinand succeeded in stopping his horses, he would immediately have returned to search for his unfortunate servant. Wentworth's heart sank within him, as the probability that his poor friend had come to an untimely end rose vividly before his imagination. At any rate, they must soon learn the truth. Wentworth had proposed leaving the horse with John ; but the latter begged that he would not do so, as he said he was unable to get up, and the horse might trample upon him, or, if he should again be overcome with stupor, might make its escape. Wentworth therefore, though somewhat unwillingly, again threw the bridle over his arm, and leaving John, and promising to return

to him as soon as possible, started again on his painful search; and passing by the turn, which the guide had mentioned as leading to the brow of the hill, continued his course along the narrow rocky lane. They had not advanced far, however, before the horse that Wentworth was leading suddenly stopped, and gave utterance to a shrill neigh. This seemed to be responded to by a faint echo at some distance, and Wentworth immediately exclaimed: — “There is one of the ponies—he and the horse are calling to one another.” A repetition of the sounds left little doubt on this point, and Wentworth then appealed to his guide, as to the situation of the spot whence the sound proceeded.

“They must have taken that turn that leads to the brow of the hill, sir—that’s all—and if they has, they must be dashed to pieces—the wonder is, that there’s ere a one left to neigh.”

Not much comforted by this speech, and yet feeling relieved at the prospect of



soon knowing the worst, whatever it might be, Wentworth, following his guide, clambered up the rough track, the end of which he had so lately passed. In truth, it was wonderful that the ponies could have drawn the carriage up such a place, at such a headlong speed. Holding the lanthorn close to the bank, the guide pointed out the mark made by one of the wheels ; which, while it showed them that they were proceeding in the right direction, gave evidence, by the deep dent made in the hard soil, of the violence with which it had been forced along. They soon arrived at the summit of the hill, where there was a kind of terrace, to which, as Wentworth had been told by his companion, parties of pleasure occasionally resorted, to gaze on the magnificent view which was spread under their feet. The hill, on this side almost precipitous, rose abruptly from the level plain, which, in this part of its course, forms the broad valley of the Severn—and under ordinary

~~circumstances~~ a beautiful and extensive prospect was commanded from its summit. On this occasion, however, the darkness was so intense, that Wentworth was hardly aware that they had now arrived at the terrace. They had seen the wheel tracks so recently that the inference now was but too obvious—the horses had dragged the carriage up to the terrace, and must therefore have really dashed headlong down the well-nigh precipitous bank on the other side. "Give me the lanthorn, and let us endeavour to find the traces of their course," said Wentworth. The terrace was grassy, and there was therefore little difficulty in following the tracks of the wheels from the point where they emerged from the rocky path to the edge of the precipice. Here it was evident that Ferdinand had made a vigorous effort to turn them from it. The rim of the wheel took a sharp curve, and the footprints of the horses were deeply indented in the turf, as though they too had been making

an effort to stop themselves. It appeared, however, to have been unavailing; the off-wheels of the carriage had gone over the edge, and then all further traces were lost. Wentworth raised his voice, in the hope that Ferdinand, if still alive, might hear him, and, by replying, guide him to where he was ;—but no answer greeted his anxiously expectant ears. He wished most earnestly that his horse would again neigh, and be answered by the pony—but no—he seemed quite satisfied with the former reply, and made no effort at obtaining another. To descend the steep bank, slippery as it was with the rain, and intersected, as the guide informed him, by numerous stone-quarries, was a task of no slight difficulty and danger; but Wentworth prepared to attempt it, and, firmly grasping his lanthorn, he descended towards a thick furze-bush which its light enabled him to discover, and from which he hoped to be able to distinguish some other resting-place, to prevent his descent

from becoming too rapid. No sooner had he reached it, however, than he instantly perceived what his heart told him was the object of his search, the body of a man lying with his face downwards, and prevented only from a further descent by a part of the dress having become entangled in the bush. To turn the face upwards, and recognize the well-known features of Ferdinand Castleton, was the work of one second. To feel that, though apparently lifeless, the vital principle was not yet extinct, was that of the next. Placing his hand upon his heart, he could distinctly feel its pulsations, and, thus re-assured from his greatest fear, Wentworth felt more capable of going through the difficult task which still remained to be performed. Shouting to his guide, he persuaded him to come down as far as the bush, leaving the horse to himself, and then their united efforts succeeded without much difficulty in raising Ferdinand on to the terrace. Here Wentworth examined

him more at leisure. He was perfectly insensible, and thoroughly soaked with the rain ; but it was some satisfaction to find that, as far as Wentworth's surgical skill extended, there were no bones broken, though, as upwards of eight hours must have elapsed since the accident, during the whole of which he had apparently been insensible, and exposed, during the last two of them, to the pelting of the pitiless storm, it was evident that his situation must be very precarious. Catching the horse, and throwing the bridle over his arm, Wentworth, assisted by the guide, carried Ferdinand to the point where they had left the groom, who, they were happy to find, had not relapsed into a state of stupor. A short consultation was then held as to the best course to be pursued, and Wentworth at length came to the conclusion that his best plan would be to leave the two wounded men with the guide at the spot where they were now assembled, while he would ride back to W——

as fast as he could, and procure a post-chaise and a surgeon, the former to convey them to Shelbridge, and the latter to attend upon them when they arrived. He accordingly started, and having prudently led his horse until he regained the high road, he then sprang into the saddle, and for the third time on that eventful night urged the animal across the plain intervening between him and W——. This time, however, it was not to the station that he directed his course, but to the town itself, where he soon arrived, and riding up to the best hotel in the place, desired a post-chaise to be instantly prepared, while he went on to arouse Doctor H——, the doctor of highest reputation in W——. He was fortunate in finding the worthy doctor at home. He was well acquainted with Mr. Castleton, and horrified at hearing the occasion of his being summoned at this untimely hour. He hastily hurried on his clothes, and by the time that Wentworth returned with the

post-chaise, was quite ready to accompany him. Wentworth, thinking that his horse had had enough work for that night, determined to leave him at W——, and to return himself with the chaise, engaging one of the stablemen of the hotel to bring him on to Shelbridge the next day, and also giving information as to the probable situation of the phaeton and ponies, in order that steps might be taken for recovering them, as far as that was possible. It was not without difficulty that they succeeded in bringing the chaise to the spot where the rest of the party had been left. When they did so, however, they found every thing in *statu quo*. Mr. Castleton was hastily examined by the doctor, who pronounced that no bones were broken, but that he apprehended a severe concussion of the brain, and feared very much that the long exposure to cold and wet might produce a fever, the result of which, under the circumstances, he could not venture to predict. He was then

lifted into the chaise, by the side of the doctor, while John, who was much recovered, was placed on the box, under the charge of Wentworth. The guide was then dismissed with the promised gratuity and having with great difficulty found a place where the chaise could be turned round, the party set forth on their homeward journey. The rain had by this time ceased; the clouds were clearing off, and soon the first streaks of twilight began to be discernible in the east. The increasing light enabled them to pursue their journey at a more rapid pace, but nevertheless the sun had risen upon the earth before they drove into the gates of Shelbridge Rectory.



## CHAPTER. V.

THE state of mind in which poor Louisa had passed the night can only be imagined by those who have themselves suffered anguish of mind, in awaiting the promised arrival of one dear to them, in an agony of suspense as to the cause of his non-appearance.

Wentworth's promise to go and inquire after her father was a real comfort to her ; and for the first hour or two after his departure she felt comparatively tranquil. She reckoned that he could not be absent more than four hours, and that by mid-

night she should, at any rate, know the worst. Feeling that now she could do nothing more to assist her father, and being of a strong and sensible turn of mind, she determined that she would employ herself in some occupation, which might divert her thoughts from herself and her anxiety. She knew by experience that nothing distracts the attention so completely as figures; and having the accounts of some charities, of which her father was manager, and the keeping of which he intrusted to her, she took them out of the drawer of the writing-table, and busied herself with casting them up, correcting and comparing them. This occupation over, she took out some work, but she found that this did not answer nearly so well. While her fingers mechanically guided the needle, her thoughts were busily imagining every kind of possible or impossible adventure that could have befallen her father. As the time approached, beyond which she had settled in her own

mind that Wentworth's return could not be delayed, she grew more and more fidgetty and anxious. Her nurse came in, pressing her to go to bed ; but she urged that she could not possibly sleep if she did ; that Mr. Wentworth's return could not now be long delayed ; and that if they heard from him that the train had arrived as usual, and that Mr. Castleton had not been a passenger, she could then go to rest quietly, and persuade herself that something unavoidable had occurred to detain him in London. With these assurances nurse was obliged to be satisfied, and complied with Louisa's invitation to remain and keep her company in the drawing-room. As, however, the time flew by, and still Wentworth came not, her alarm and uneasiness increased with every minute that elapsed ; and the very circumstance of Wentworth's journey, which had at first been a consolation to her, now only served to aggravate her fears. Had he not started to enquire for her father,

she might perhaps as the night wore on, have persuaded herself that no news was gone news and that her father had remained safely in town: but now she knew that that had been the case Wentworth must have returned ere this, with the information: and as she could not possibly account by any hypothesis, for his prolonged absence, her fears assumed that awful shape which is always possessed by unknown and indefinite terrors. Her old nurse, ere long, fell fast asleep in an arm-chair, and there was nothing now to break the spell. The lamp burnt dimly, as its light was at the point of extinction; and in the flickering, uncertain glare, which served but to make the darkness visible, there was ample scope for the restlessness and feverishness, produced by want of sleep, to conjure up all the horrid visions of a diseased imagination. Suddenly she aroused herself, recalled the powers of her mind, and walking with a firm step to the window, flung back the shutter, threw open

casement, and admitted the light of sun, now just rising, to illumine the dark gloomy apartment, and the fresh breeze of the morning to cool her burning, feverish brow. It was indeed a glorious sight that met her eye. The clouds that

had been discharging so heavily during the night had rolled off, just sufficiently to enable the sun to rise in unveiled splendour; while they reflected his rays on their massive surfaces and fantastic forms with every variety of hue, from the deepest crimson to the faintest tint of blue-colour, that melted imperceptibly into grey. The opposite side of the valley was still wrapped in shade, but, as her eye wandered to the woods that clothed the top of the hill on which the parsonage stood, she saw the trees, now, for the most part, clothed in their spring attire, displaying in the brilliant sunshine their varied hues of every shade of varying green. The rain which had fallen during the night had imparted to them an indes-

cribable freshness ; and not to them alone, but to every living thing that met the eye. The emerald grass seemed visibly to grow and increase under her eyes, as it shook off the glittering drops which sparkled in the light like diamonds ; while the perfume that arose from the flowers, the leaves, the very earth itself, stole most gratefully upon the senses. The ear, too, was not without its share in the treat which nature, at such moments, vouchsafes to those who contemplate her. From the woods and hedge-rows arose a volume of song, from every species of the feathered tribe. The nightingale still continued to pour forth her melodious notes ; while the scarcely less beautiful tones of the thrush, mingling with those of the black-bird and a host of others, vindicated the unparalleled beauty of nature's self-taught choir. The lark, now soaring up, as it were, to meet the sun, poured forth the fulness of his heart in a flood of liquid harmony. All, all around was gay, joyous

and sparkling ; and, for the first few minutes Louisa's still childish spirit partook of the general joyousness. She loved nature ardently ; and the sight of it, thus adorned in its gayest garb, called forth a corresponding feeling of gaiety in her mind. But soon the force of the terrible contrast smote upon her heart. All around her was indeed joyous and cheerful, and at any former period of her existence her own spirits would have risen with the occasion ; but now the thought of her poor father—his possible fate—her own heart-rending anxiety—rushed upon her ; and she almost hated herself for allowing herself to give way for a moment to the feelings, which the scene around her was so well calculated to call forth ; and now the brilliant sun-light seemed more odious to her than had been the shadows in that darkened room. Such were her feelings when, suddenly, the sound of wheels smote upon her ear. She listened ; she could not mistake ; that they were wheels there was no doubt ; but as

they approached, it was equally evident to her practised ear, that they were not the wheels of the pony phaeton ; nor did the heavy tramp that accompanied them betoken the light, rattling motion of the ponies' feet. An agony of suspense overwhelmed her heart. It might, after all, have nothing to do with her or her's ; and, if it had, what then ? The clear morning air had borne the sound from such a distance, that it was many minutes ere her eyes caught a glimpse of the yellow postchaise, with Wentworth and John upon the box. She was startled at seeing the former jump off to open the gate, in lieu of the latter, who she then perceived was reclining rather than sitting on his seat. She rushed to the house-door ; and Wentworth, seeing her there, ran rapidly on, in advance of the carriage, and perceiving that no time was to be lost in declaring the truth, exclaimed, " He is safe, Miss Castleton ; that is, he lives ; but there has been a serious accident, and



you must be prepared to find him dangerously hurt. The doctor is in the carriage with him."

This gleam of hope revived her heart, which had been almost ready to burst; and, as Wentworth concluded, the post-chaise drove up to the door, and she could see her father's pale features and apparently lifeless form supported in the doctor's arms. At Wentworth's suggestion she ran up-stairs to her father's room, whither he was immediately transported in the arms of Wentworth and the doctor; John being assisted by the nurse, who was now thoroughly aroused, to his own room, where the doctor promised to visit him, as soon as he had done all that he could for Mr. Castleton.

Mr. Castleton being undressed and placed in a warm bed, Dr. H. proceeded to make a more complete examination of him than he had, as yet, been able to do, the result of which, however, served but to confirm his former opinion. There

were no broken bones, but the brain had sustained severe concussion, which, coupled with the exposure to the cold and rain, had produced a violent access of fever. He told Louisa that nothing further could be done for her father at present, and entreated her to retire and take some repose, which she, at length unwillingly consented to do.

When, after a brief interval of broken slumber, she returned to her father's bedside, no apparent change had taken place but as she moved about the darkened room arranging various articles for his convenience and the doctor's, she fancied that his eyes were open, and were following all her motions. Going gently to his bedside and bending over him, she found, indeed that his eyes were open, and that consciousness had apparently returned. She did not speak, not knowing whether she ought to encourage him to address her or not. He gazed fondly in her face, and then, taking her hand, pressed it caress

ingly to his lips. Louisa felt frightened. Her father had often kissed and fondled her, but never in that way; nor had he ever kissed her hand. Presently his lips moved, and she distinctly heard him mutter, "My own darling." This again struck her as strange. Not that he had not often called her "his darling," but there was a tone in it which he had not been used to employ towards her. "My sweet love, why do you look so coldly at me," said he again, "come and kiss me." Though still puzzled at his words and tone, she stooped and kissed his forehead. He did not, however, seem quite satisfied, and gazed at her for some time with an uneasy, inquisitive look, which presently ceased, as his eyelids closed, and he again relapsed into stupor.

He, however, still retained his hold of her hand, so that she could not leave him. She bent fondly over him, wondering what this curious change in his manner to her could mean. It was not long before he

re-opened his eyes, and whispered, "I have been to Cambridge, love, and stood upon that bridge where we stood together, you know ; let me see, I don't know how long ago. I missed you sadly, my darling, and felt very unhappy for the want of you." This was still more inexplicable to Louisa. She had never been at Cambridge, and though she could fancy that her father might have missed her, and wished for her, it could not be because he had ever been with her there before. Suddenly a light broke in upon her. He was delirious, and took her for her mother! —as, indeed, he well might do ; for, though she was younger, by a couple of years, than her mother had been when Ferdinand first made her acquaintance, the likeness between them was already very strong. Louisa felt dreadfully frightened. There is something alarming always in being in the presence of one who is not conscious of his own actions, or has lost the command over his own ideas ; and to be left

alone with a person delirious is enough to shake the nerves of any one unaccustomed to it, particularly if a young person. But to hear herself taken for another, to listen to terms of affection, and feel embraces which she knew to be meant for another, and that other now for fourteen years laid in the silent tomb, was awful to poor Louisa's feelings. She knew not whether most to dread her father's continuance in his error, or his discovery of it. There was something very dreadful in hearing him talk of things long past and gone as if they were present, and yet she dreaded the effect of his disappointment on finding out the truth, both for himself, and, also for her; for she feared that at the moment he would hate her; and to be hated by the being whom one loves best on earth, even in their moments of delirium, is a trial of no ordinary nature.

She thought that it might be best to favour the delusion, and to speak to him in the character of her mother; but her

heart almost revolted from what appeared to be an obtaining of his caresses under false pretences. It was an innocent deception certainly ; but she had been brought up in a terror of all deceit, and this particular species seemed to her to be peculiarly revolting. It was, therefore, a great relief to her when her nurse entered the room. " He takes me for mamma," she softly whispered ; " what am I to do, nurse ? "

The nurse, whose conscience was not so sensitive, soon settled the point, by desiring her to humour the sick man to the top of his bent, and, as far as she could, foster the delusion that she was, indeed, the Louisa whom, for so many years, he had so bitterly mourned. Once persuaded that this was, indeed, her path of duty, Louisa allowed no repugnance to it on her part to divert her from it. And it was, indeed, a touching spectacle to see that grief-stricken man talking of himself as still in the joyful heyday of youth, with

a long future before him, to be enjoyed in company with the chosen of his heart and that fair girl, her mind tortured as it was by fears for his health and safety, humouring his delusion, and taking upon herself the part of the mother, whom she had never seen, and whom she yet so wonderfully resembled. The ramblings of delirium now revealed to her an entirely new phase in her father's character. She had been accustomed to see him always, indeed, cheerful, serene, and communicative ; but, at the same time, grave, sedate, and, in short, clothed with the characteristics of one who had suffered much, and suffered well. She, however, had never thought of analyzing his character, or seeking the springs that influenced his manner and tone of life and conversation. He had always been the same in her recollection, and she would as soon have thought of seeking for the cause of the leaves being green, and the sky blue, as of enquiring why her father was what he was. Now,

however, she saw him under an entirely new aspect. No longer the serious, grave clergyman, of mature years, whose natural melancholy was only qualified and subdued by his sense of religion, which inspired him with cheerfulness, but the ardent, gay, hopeful young man, exulting in his youth, his spirits, and his talents, and in the possession of the object of his affections; for he continued uniformly to imagine that Louisa was his newly-married wife, and he spoke of future plans and prospects in a manner which preached more to the young girl's heart than any sermon, however eloquent, of the vanity of human wishes and projects.

By being thus carried back to the past the present became, as it were, a future and she seemed endowed with prophetic powers. And as she listened to his ravings, she became aware how very deep had been his love for her mother—how desperate must have been his agony at losing her; and she learnt more than



ever to appreciate the piety which had enabled him, after so much suffering, to preserve the tranquil resignation which he always exhibited.

For many days Dr. H— would not pronounce his patient out of danger ; and when, at length, he did so, he announced, at the same time, that his convalescence must be necessarily slow. During all this time Wentworth was daily at the parsonage, though his visits could not be protracted, as the whole care of the parish was now thrown upon him. Louisa, however, insisted on being kept *au fait* with all that was going on among the poor people, as she felt that it would not be right to allow her anxiety for one invalid to exclude from her care and thoughts the many aged and sick persons whom she was constantly in the habit of visiting and attending ; for, though young in years, she had been so much in the habit, from her earliest childhood, of accompanying her father in his parochial visits, that

she was as capable of appreciating and administering to the wants of the poor as many an older person, who had been less accustomed to the occupation. She was now unable to continue her personal visits ; but she heard daily from Wentworth of her *protégés*, and she took care that their temporal wants, at any rate, should not suffer from her father's illness. The more that Wentworth saw of her, the more was he struck with the many beautiful points in her character that were brought under his observation. Her affection and devotion to her father—her care and thoughtfulness for her poorer friends—her patience under grief and anxiety—and her firm reliance in the goodness of the Almighty, and faith in his promises, showed that she was endowed with no ordinary natural qualities, which had been strengthened and developed by no ordinary care in her education. He soon came to regard the few minutes that he was able to spend in her society, as the most agreeable in the day.

He forgot that she was still a child, ten years younger than himself, and valued her conversation more than that of the most fascinating woman of his acquaintance. In truth, her mental qualifications and endowments were far beyond her years, though in innocence, truthfulness, and simplicity, she was still a child. All shyness and embarrassment in Wentworth's presence were soon laid aside. The many subjects of interest that they had in common served to strengthen the chain that bound them together, and she came, in time, to consider and treat him almost as an elder brother.

## CHAPTER VI.

It was on a Sunday evening, some weeks after the date of Mr. Castleton's accident, that he was sitting with his daughter and Mr. Wentworth at the open window, gazing on the beautiful prospect before him, seen now in the mellow light cast by the declining sun across the valley. They had finished their dinner, which upon Sundays Wentworth always shared with the family at the parsonage. Mr. Castleton thought that both for him and his curate, after the fatigues of the day (for to a clergyman, the Sabbath

is anything but a day of rest), rational conversation and companionship was the best of relaxations. He would never have dined at a formal dinner party on that day ; but he always said that he did not conceive that there could be anything repugnant to his Christian duty, in sharing his repast with his fellow-labourer, whose society afforded him real refreshment and enjoyment. When some one once urged that he was thereby giving unnecessary trouble to his servants on the day of rest, he replied that the same dinner which served for him and his daughter, served equally for his curate—that his servants had therefore no extra employment, while those of Mr. Wentworth were all freed entirely from attendance upon him, and that therefore, even in that point of view, he contended that this arrangement was not only justifiable but commendable.

It was therefore arranged that, as a matter of course, Mr. Wentworth dined with his rector every Sunday. This rule

had been broken through, however, during the illness of the latter ; and this was the first Sunday on which Mr. Castleton had dined down-stairs, and on which Wentworth, therefore, had again joined the party—and truly thankful did all that party feel, that it had thus pleased the Almighty to permit them once more to resume, so far, the agreeable routine of their daily occupation. This feeling of gratitude that filled their hearts was probably the cause why for some minutes they all sat in silence ; Mr. Castleton in an easy chair, which had been wheeled to his favourite window, his lovely daughter on a stool at his feet, her head resting on his knee ; while Wentworth, at the opposite corner of the window, thought not without satisfaction of the share that he had had in rescuing the father from an untimely death, and restoring him to the arms of his daughter.

After a pause of several minutes, Louisa broke the silence, and, looking up into her father's face, said—

“Dearest papa, you cannot think how happy it makes me, to have you sitting here again, amongst us once more.”

“Indeed, my darling,” he replied, “we have every reason to be grateful to Him who has watched over us during the hours of pain and grief, and has thus restored us so far to health and happiness. Think of the almost miraculous escape that I had from instant death, when the ponies ran away ; if I had not been able to turn them from that bridge, I should inevitably have been upset, and probably dashed to pieces. When the carriage was finally overturned, if I had become entangled with the carriage or harness, and so rolled down the hill with them, I could not have escaped destruction. When I was flung clear of them, if my coat had not caught in that furze bush, I should have rolled on into that stone quarry, which was yawning only a few yards below me. Finally, if that horse had not neighed at the moment it did, my brave young friend here,” and he

laid his hand on Wentworth's arm, "would have passed by without discovering me, and a few hours longer, without assistance, would probably have sealed my fate. Is not the finger of Providence most evident in all this combination of what careless people call chance? And during my illness, though its influence was not so immediately apparent, who can doubt but that it was His Spirit that aided the skill of the physician, and has restored me thus to the caresses of my darling daughter, who is, I am sure, thankful for this and all the benefits she is so continually receiving at the hands of her Maker."

"Yes, dear papa, indeed she is most grateful—but I hope you will not think me very wicked for wondering why Providence, which, as you say, guides and overrules everything in this world, did not prevent the accident altogether, and enable you to restrain the ponies' impetuosity, and drive home quietly."

"My dear child," replied her father,



"it is not for us to imagine that we can read all the secrets of Providence, or discover always the good that Faith teaches us is invariably, if we did but know it, to be derived from all that befalls us. Sometimes, indeed, even our darkened vision may discover, after the event, the benefits that have accrued to us from afflictions which, at the time, were hard to bear ; but often this is hidden in the deep counsels of the Almighty, and we must rest satisfied with the assurance that he is all good and all merciful, and that he has some wise end in view, to which we cannot penetrate. In the present instance, however, I may perhaps be able to point out to you some of the good effects which have resulted from this visitation. It has taught you self-reliance and independence. Had you always rested on me to counsel and advise you, and direct you how to act, you would never have learnt to act for yourself. I have now been withdrawn from you for a time, during which

you have been obliged to think for yourself, and to act independently for the good of me, the household, and, to some extent, the parish. It has taught us both to appreciate the worth of our friend here, and has enabled him to render me a valuable service, for which we shall both of us always feel grateful to him ; while, to himself, if I mistake not, it has been of service in throwing the burden of the parish upon him for a time, and also to him, as well as to all of us, in reading us a lesson on the uncertainty of human life."

"It has indeed been a lesson to me, in many ways," said Wentworth ; "in fact, save and except for my sorrow and anxiety for you and Miss Castleton, I may say that it has been a source of unmixed good to me ; for, besides the benefits which you have mentioned, it has procured me the unspeakable advantage of a better acquaintance with you, and many opportunities of observing the great virtues

which adorn the characters of both father and daughter."

"Nay, Wentworth, no flattery," said Mr. Castleton, smiling; "I am sure the advantage has been as much on our side as on yours. Anything which serves to knit closer together the bonds that unite us, cannot but be of advantage to me, at least—I hope to both."

As he spoke, a slight blush tinged Wentworth's cheek, and his eye almost unconsciously fell upon Louisa. She was gazing in her father's face, and hanging upon his words, as she generally did when he spoke, and did not observe the glance; but Ferdinand did—and thought to himself, that if, in years to come, this youthful intimacy should ripen to anything more tender, it would be a gratification to his dying moments to reflect that he had confided his daughter to one so everyway worthy as William Wentworth.

"Well, papa," said Louisa, after another short silence, "you certainly have dis-

covered a great deal of good that has resulted from your accident ; and I can tell you of something more—it has made your little daughter love you ten thousand times more than ever. But how far do you think we are justified in looking upon certain events that befall us as judgments or dispensations of Providence ?”

“ In one sense every thing is a dispensation of Providence, since nothing happens without its overruling influence. But, of course, the ends for which such events are brought about we are scarcely able to discern, even when they happens to ourselves—rarely, if ever, when they befall others. Under the Jewish dispensation, God certainly was pleased to visit crimes both personal and national, with specific punishments ; but in our days, I am inclined to believe that every judgment of God is, in reality, sent in mercy to the offender, to bring him back, if possible, to the way of truth, and not so much as a punishment, properly so called, for

his crime. We see so many instances of the prosperity of the wicked in this world, that it is plain that we are not to expect that the good shall be rewarded, and the wicked punished, here ; and, therefore, when a notoriously wicked man has met with some severe misfortune, I never like to hear it said, 'It is a judgment upon him.' It implies an uncharitable feeling in the hearts of those who say it, and they necessarily speak in perfect ignorance of the real purposes of the Almighty. If a man says of himself, 'This is a judgment for my offences,' it is well, for he will then be led to see them, and, perhaps, to repent of them ; but to those who say so of others, I would say, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' "

"No doubt," said Wentworth, "there is a great deal of truth in what you have said ; but still there appears to be a difficulty in acknowledging that such and such fortunate events and occurrences are the immediate work of God, and in thank-

ing him for them, as special mercies vouchsafed to us, and yet in refusing to acknowledge that evils that may befall us are his special judgments."

"I did not quite say that," answered Ferdinand; "when evils happen to ourselves, I think we may be quite justified in assuming them to be judgments, *merciful* judgments of God. All of us, who think at all seriously on such matters, are conscious of sins that deserve far greater punishments than any evils we are called upon to suffer. I conceive that we may well consider an evil that befalls us as a judgment for some sin that we know we have committed; but I do not consider that, because some action of ours has been attended with unfortunate results, that we are therefore to think that it was contrary to the will of God, or, in fact, that, in any indifferent matter, we have a right to draw any inference as to the propriety of it in the sight of God from its results. But I was more especially speaking of the judg-

ment that we pass on others. And my objection is to the custom that is too common of saying, when any misfortune befalls a man whose conduct may not have met with general approval, ‘See the judgment that has befallen him.’ As I said before, such speaking savours of uncharitableness and censoriousness, and I conceive that we have no right to pronounce in that manner upon God’s dealing with our fellow sinners.”

“But then,” said Louisa, “if all the misfortunes that befall us are sent from God, and are designed ultimately for our benefit, how can we be justified in praying to be delivered from them?”

“We have God’s own command for doing so ; and the very object of the affliction may have been to teach us to pray, and place our trust in Him. If we pray in a proper spirit, we know that God will hear our prayer, and will grant it—not, perhaps, immediately, in the sense in which we at the time desire it to be granted,

our interests: and in the way in which  
 the minute wisdom perceives to be in  
 our interests. It would be well ho-  
 wever, if we always might be chosen to con-  
 sider ourselves the Almighty to gra-  
 tify in the sense in which it would  
 best for our benefit that they should  
 choose and in paying for deliverance  
 from misfortune. It may be that we may  
 be chosen to receive the full benefit which  
 I was always intended to receive up-  
 on it. If we may thus, we may be gra-  
 tified that there can be no harm in pray-  
 ing to be delivered from temporal evils, as  
 Christ said himself, saying that if  
 we will Father's will that may of some  
 might pass from him.

At this point in their conversation  
 Warrington pulled out his watch, and  
 seeing that he had promised to go a-  
 head to a sick person, who had been un-  
 able to go to church, said that it was time  
 for him to take his leave.

When he was gone, Ferdinand drew



daughter close to him, and said, "I hear, darling, that when I was ill I was delirious. I want you to tell me whether any of my ravings were intelligible, and if so, what they were about."

"Yes, dear papa, they were many of them quite intelligible ; but I do not think I ought to tell you what they were about. It might excite you again too much, and you know you are not quite well yet, and it might throw you back again."

"Nay, dearest, you need not fear that. But, to save you the responsibility of telling me, I will open the subject, and tell you that it was about your dear departed mother."

"Yes, papa, that is very true ; how could you know it ?"

"It is not difficult to guess that that, which so much occupies our waking thoughts, should be dominant during sleep or delirium. Moreover, recollections of the past had been strongly roused by the scenes I have lately been passing through ;

and as I had been even more than ordinarily dwelling on your mother's memory, it was very natural that, in the access of fever, my mind should run upon her. But tell me, dear, what did I say?"

"Well, dear papa, if I must tell you, you seemed to imagine yourself again a young man, and you seemed to think that I was mamma. You addressed me as such; and as they told me I ought to favour the delusion, I answered as well as I could in her character. I hope you do not think that I acted wrongly in doing so?"

"No, dear; in cases of that kind, a little harmless deception cannot be wrong. The crime of deception lies in the *intent* to deceive; but, in the case of a delirious person, he having no power of reasoning, cannot *really* be deceived, though he may apparently be so at the time. There could therefore be no harm in your assuming a character not your own, in order to be of service to me, when I was not in the pos-

session of my own faculties ; but it must have been very painful to yourself to do so. Was it not ? ”

“ Oh ! yes ; and you cannot conceive what an impression the scene has made upon me. Dear, dear papa, how very, very much you must have loved my poor mother, and how nobly you have borne up against the suffering you must have experienced ever since her death.”

“ Yes, I have suffered, greatly suffered,” he replied ; “ but when God sends affliction, he also sends strength to bear it, to all those who rightly seek it. I can never feel sufficiently grateful to my excellent mother, who taught me where to go for comfort in sorrow, and for help in time of trouble. Her lessons sank deep into my heart ; and though they did not bring forth all the fruit they should have done, in the days of my joy and prosperity, they have been of most inestimable advantage to me in those of grief and adversity. That I may be to you what she has been to me, is ever my constant prayer.”

“ Indeed, indeed, my dearest father, I should be a very wicked girl if I did not profit by your precepts, supported as they are by such excellent examples; but may I ask you one question more, or does it pain you too much to speak on the subject? ”

“ Ask what you will, my child. I like to speak to you on a subject of which I am constantly thinking ”

“ Well, then, did it never strike you as a hard case that you, who are so good should be made to suffer so much; and have you ever found out the good that, as you believe, always lies at the bottom of our apparent misfortunes? ”

“ To your first question, dear Louisa, am happy to be able to answer that I never was guilty of thinking that any decree of the Almighty could be unjust which is implied by what you call ‘a hard case.’ It is true that, in those days of joy and happiness, I thought far too little of sacred subjects; but I even then thought enough to be well aware that the sever

chastisements that He could inflict could not be more than my sins had deserved. Your second is more difficult to answer. That I long and vainly asked myself what end was attained in separating two beings so devotedly attached as we were, is true. That I could not see the good of a dispensation which deprived you of a mother, as well as myself of a loving wife, is also true; and that I do not yet see many, perhaps most, of the reasons why such an affliction was a blessing, is probably truer still. But I have thought often on the subject, and I have not been unsuccessful in discerning some points in which I could find it in my heart to be thankful for your mother's death. In the first place, she is removed from a world of trial and temptation, and it is possible that, had she remained longer in it, she might have been exposed to greater trials and temptations than she could have entirely resisted, and might thus have been less fit for heaven at a later period of her existence, than at the time of her death.

Cases constantly come within the experience of a parochial clergyman, when he cannot but feel that an early death would have been a real benefit : and so ignorant are we of the future that, unlikely as it seemed, that might have been your poor mother's case : and, of course, if that were the case, my love for her was far too deep, too sincere, to repine at her loss. In the second place it may have been a benefit to me also, in removing that which I loved but too much, and thus weaning my affections from the things of this world, and bringing them nearer to God ; and, in the third place, the change in my life, which ensued, may have been of benefit both to you, who have been brought up in a very different manner from what would have been the case had I still been connected with official life, and continued to live in London ; and also to the people here, amongst whom it has pleased God to allow my ministry to have a very beneficial effect. These are some of the good ends which, I have imagined,

may have been designed to be answered by my severe affliction. There may be, as I said before—there doubtless are—many more of these; and those that I have stated are, of course, only conjectural. My faith makes me certain that some good was wrought by a dispensation which brought upon me such terrible affliction. To attempt to discover that good is a harmless, nay, if properly undertaken, is a useful and profitable study. I have now told you my ideas of what is *possible* on this subject. They may be mistaken—are undeniably uncertain—but one thing is certain:—a good purpose was effected. Always hold by that faith, my darling child, and you will be able to bear, in patience and resignation, whatever misfortunes may be in store for you in this world of sorrow. And now I am rather tired, so you must let me creep up-stairs to bed.”

## CHAPTER VII.

THE following morning, the sound of a horse's steps on the approach road announced a visitor, who speedily proved to be Lord Abbotsham, who had ridden over from Stapleford Castle, about ten miles distant, to see his brother, and inquire after his health.

“ Well, my dear niece,” said he, as he entered the room, “ what account can you give me of your father ?”

“ Oh ! uncle Abbotsham, I am so glad to see you ! Papa is going on very well indeed ; he is not come down stairs yet, but



you can go up to him if you like, unless you will wait here till he comes down, and tell me all the news in the meantime."

"As for that, there is nothing I should like better than half an hour's chat with you, my little Queen of the May; but you look so uncommonly busy, that I am afraid of interrupting you."

"It's Monday, you know, uncle, and Monday is bill day, and these are all our weekly bills, and it is always a tiresome business adding them up—the people write so badly; and then the butcher always manages to send such uncomfortable quantities of meat, and I am perpetually trying to find out how much seven pounds ten ounces of meat, at sixpence halfpenny a pound, come to, and it really is a very difficult calculation."

"Well, so it is," said Lord Abbotsham; "and I will leave you to it, and run upstairs and see your father, for I am afraid I cannot pay a very long visit."

With these words he left the room, and ran up-stairs to his brother's bed-room, where he found him in the act of dressing.

The meeting between the brothers was cordial. They were much attached to each other: and though their paths in life were so different, that they did not meet so often as they could wish, still they never did so without feeling the most sincere pleasure. Lord Abbotsham, though not so active a politician as his father, was very much devoted to the House of Commons, of which he had been a member ever since he attained his majority. He never distinguished himself particularly as an orator, but whenever he did speak he was always listened to with respect, as he was known to be a man who did not speak for the sake of displaying his eloquence, or even of assisting his party—but simply to express his ideas on any subject which he might have thought worthy his consideration. For though he was a steady adherent to his party, and uniformly

supported them with his *vote*, he never committed himself by speaking, unless he felt conscious of having something to say both important and original. His life had been an easy and a happy one. He had grieved at the death of his mother, and he had felt deeply for Ferdinand in his affliction ; but in other respects he had hardly known grief or care. He had remained long unmarried ; but about a year previous to the marriage of his sister, he had forsaken his bachelor's life. A little cloud seemed now gathering in his horizon, inasmuch as there was as yet no prospect of an increase to his family. He did not, however, allow this fact to annoy him much. After all, he had only been married a year, and there was no reason why his wishes even in this point should not ultimately be fulfilled. He had now been staying at Stapleford Castle for some time, having come down there on the news of Ferdinand's accident, that he might be in the way to afford any assistance in his

power. He had found Ferdinand so well cared for by his daughter and by Wentworth, that there was no necessity for him to take up his residence at the rectory; and feeling that by doing so he might only be giving extra trouble to Ferdinand's servants, he had remained at the castle, and ridden over constantly to make inquiries, and latterly to visit his brother.

After the first inquiries after Ferdinand's health, &c., Lord Abbotsham said :

“ I saw your little Louisa down stairs as busy as a bee with her accounts. How pretty she is growing.”

“ Is she indeed ?” said Ferdinand, smiling ; “ I hope you did not tell her so.”

“ Not I,” said his brother ; “ besides, if I had, she was much too busy to hear me ; going over, as she said, the abstruse calculations imposed upon her by the butcher, baker, &c.”

“ Their accounts are somewhat complicated, certainly,” said Ferdinand. “ I

sometimes think that a better arrangement of our coinage would much facilitate all kinds of mercantile and commercial transactions."

"And so it certainly would," said Lord Abbotsham. "I assure you I have very serious thoughts of pressing it on the attention of government next session. There really are few *great* difficulties in the way of a general decimal coinage. Divide the sovereign into ten parts; call each part a florin, a rupee, or what you will. Divide that again into a hundred cents, and the thing is done—and, after all, with a very trifling change in the coinage. There are forty-eight farthings in a shilling, and, consequently, ninety-six in a florin. The cent would therefore be a copper coin almost imperceptibly smaller than a farthing. The double cent, in like manner, would be a trifle less than our present halfpenny. The penny I would make larger than at present, and equal in value to five cents, or the tenth of a shilling."

“ But would you have nothing between the shilling and the penny ? ”

“ Oh yes ; the sixpence might remain as at present, only under a new name ; and I would have small silver coin equal to the tenth of a florin—that is, it would be rather smaller than a threepenny piece.”

“ But then you would be obliged to call in all the copper coinage, and have an entirely new one struck.”

“ A new one should be struck certainly, but the old I should think need hardly be called in. At least, it should be optional for a certain time with every one to pay it into the bank and receive its equivalent in new money ; but for those who did not do so, a proclamation might be issued commanding all farthings to be henceforward decreed to be cents, and so on of the others.”

“ But that would be hard on the holders, would it not ? ”

“ No ; for, in the first instance, they

would have had the option of changing it, and then what they lost in one coin they would gain in another. For instance, suppose a person had six pennyworth of copper, consisting of two pence, four half-pence, and eight farthings. After this imaginary proclamation, his two pence would be worth ten cents ; his four half-pence would be worth eight ; and his farthings eight more. He would, therefore, be worth twenty-six cents, while the silver sixpence would be only equivalent to twenty-five."

"But the government would be put to a great expense for the new coinage."

"They might easily pay themselves, if only by the penny postage ; for if ten stamps only were sold for a shilling, the difference to the revenue would be very great, as the additional cost would not be enough to prevent a single letter from being written."

"But then, after all, when you had got your new coinage, you would never be able to persuade the shopkeepers

to keep their accounts in florins and cents—they would always go on with their shillings and pence, and then you would gain nothing ; for it is not the coin one pays in, but that which one reckons in that is of importance. You might have florins struck to-morrow, and no one would use them, except as small half-crowns.”

“There would be some difficulty certainly in that ; but the government might cause all their accounts to be made out in the new notation. All contracts, &c. sent to them might be compelled to be so. The great banking and commercial houses would adopt it, from the vast amount of labour that it would save ; and if example like that was, after all, found to have no effect, a law might be passed that no actions should lie for debt, that no receipts should be valid, that no insolvent or bankrupt should receive his certificate, unless his accounts had been so kept.”

“That would be rather an extreme measure, I fear,” said Ferdinand, smiling ;



"but, perhaps, without that, people's common sense might induce them to save themselves trouble ; but there is a more serious consideration than that. I fear the poor would suffer greatly from the raising the value of the penny. They deal so much in small purchases, and I fear they would not get more for their penny than they did before, while they would only get tenpence for their shilling instead of twelve."

"But then they would get five cents for their penny instead of four farthings."

"True ; but, in the first place, the advantage then is not so great as the loss in the other case ; secondly, there are many more things sold by the penny than by the farthing ; and, thirdly, the shopkeepers would always manage to turn a change of that kind, which the poor would not understand, to their own advantage."

"There may be some truth in what you say," said Lord Abbotsham ; "but, depend upon it, all these things find their level

very soon. If one baker only sold ten penny rolls for a shilling, you may depend upon it he would soon find a rival who would sell twelve, or who would make each of the ten large enough to make up the difference, and so on with everything else ; the laws of supply and demand are too immutable for a change of this sort to effect anything but a very temporary derangement. I remember staying in the Isle of Man, in the year 1840, when the copper currency, which had been that of fourteen pence to the shilling, was assimilated to ours. The poor people all thought themselves cheated ; there was a small *émeute*, which was quelled by a dozen constables, and in six months' time nothing more was heard about it."

" Well, I hope you are right," said Ferdinand, " for it certainly would be a great boon to be saved all that compound addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division."

" I should think so !" replied his bro-

ther, "when 12456 meant either twelve pounds, four florins, and fifty-six cents, or twelve thousand four hundred and fifty-six cents, according as it suited us best. I assure you I mean to bring it forward in the House, and I am told we have some chance of getting the florin coined. That will be one step, though, of course, until we get the copper coinage changed, it will be quite useless as a real benefit of itself. But come, I see you are dressed now ; let us go down and see if my pretty little niece has finished her labours."

On entering the drawing-room, they found Louisa had, indeed, finished her task, and was busily employed in putting the finishing strokes to a very pretty drawing.

"What a clever little woman it is!" said Lord Abbotsham, patting her head. "I believe there is nothing that you cannot turn your hand to. By the bye, Ferdinand, I don't know what put it into my head, but have you yet seen your new neighbour, Mrs. Vernon?"

“No, I have not,” said Ferdinand. “I have never happened to meet her. I was thinking of driving over to call upon her as soon as the fine weather set in ; but then came Barbara’s marriage, and then my accident, since which I have not been out in the carriage. I am going to-day to drive for the first time.”

“Well, why should not you drive over to Moor Park, and call there to-day ? I assure you she takes a lively interest in you. She was so excited when she heard of your accident, that I never go near her that she does not overwhelm me with enquiries ; you really ought to take some notice of her, and then I think you would like her. She is a very agreeable person, very easy in hand, and plenty to say ; a little too fond of scandal, perhaps, and her stories are not always of the most good natured kind, but then they are very seldom true, so that they do not do much harm.”

“Upon my word,” said Ferdinand,

laughing, "you do not draw a very amiable picture of her. Talking scandal is bad enough ; but telling ill-natured stories of people, which are not even true, is finding in the lowest depth a lower deep with a vengeance."

"Oh, but then nobody believes the stories, you know. I knew her very well in town. She had a good house, gave excellent dinners, and generally managed to bring some clever, agreeable people together to eat them. We laughed at her stories at the time ; but her want of veracity is so well known, that no one ever dreams of believing what she says, or, if one has any conscience at all, of repeating it as a fact, without at the same time giving her authority, which is quite antidote sufficient to any harm it might do, I assure you."

"If I thought you were speaking your real sentiments now, Abbotsham, I should give you a good scolding, though you are my elder brother, for giving utterance to such a dangerous doctrine. No

matter how false a story may be, there are always some who will believe it, either credulously because they are foolish, or eagerly because they are wicked. The original authority on which the story is told is soon lost sight of; the story itself, however bad it may have been in the beginning, is sure to become worse in the repetition, and consequences the most disastrous, from which even the first inventor of the story would shrink with horror may sometimes be the result. No one knows when he is carelessly repeating a story, 'just for something to say,' the mischief he may be doing. One ought really to be very cautious of telling even a true story, if it contain anything to any one's disadvantage; but to be the narrator, or still worse, the inventor, of a false one, is indeed, to incur a very serious responsibility."

"Indeed, you are quite right," replied Lord Abbotsham, "and I was not quite serious in what I said, though you must allow that when a person is universally dis

believed, the calumnies lose more than half their sting."

"She is not so dangerous, certainly ; but then what an object of contempt must she have become to all the thinking part of her acquaintance."

"*She*, indeed," interrupted Louisa, laughing. "Uncle Abbotsham said *person*, and you immediately say *she*. Pray, why not *he* ?"

"Well, it was hardly fair, I confess," said her father ; " but I fear that though our sex has very many faults peculiar to itself, that this particular one of calumny and scandal-mongering is more often to be charged to yours. But about this Mrs. Vernon—who and what is she, and how does she happen to have settled here ?"

"As to who or what she is, I can hardly tell you, except that she is a very clever woman—of no fortune or family herself, I believe—who managed to captivate the affections of James Vernon, a man who had a considerable fortune, made in busi-

ness, and also a certain reputation for wit, and an acquaintance with many distinguished ornaments of the literary world. In that way, when he and his wife came to reside in London, now many years ago, they effected their introduction into society. She was determined to acquire a status there, and being, as I said before, clever, with plenty of money, and rather good looks, she succeeded very fairly in her object, though more with the gentlemen than with the ladies, who, though they went to her parties, always looked upon her with something bordering on dislike. Two or three years ago, the death of her husband compelled her to seek seclusion for a time, which she the less regretted as the period was fast approaching when she could not in decency delay any longer to bring out the eldest of her daughters, of whom she has two. A prettyish, clever woman, fond of the world, and the admiration of the world—especially the male portion of it—is never very well pleased



at becoming the *chaperone* of her daughter. When the daughter is beautiful and captivating, however, the blow is softened by the pleasure which the admiration excited by a daughter must always cause in the heart of a mother, unless absolutely depraved. But in this case that consolation was wanting, for Susan Vernon cannot be called pretty by the most devoted admirer, and is only saved from being absolutely plain by the gentle, amiable expression of her countenance. She went abroad with her daughters, and has been touring about ever since. She is now returned to England, and intends to resume her campaigns in London next season, when her youngest daughter, who is much more after her mother's own heart, will be coming out ; and in her triumphs she flatters herself that she shall be consoled for the failure which she anticipates for her eldest."

"Poor Miss Vernon ! how I pity her," said Louisa ; "not for the want of beauty

so much, as from her mother's thinking so much about her deficiency in that respect; but is she deficient in other respects also?"

"I really hardly know her," replied Lord Abbotsham; "when I knew them in town, she was in the school-room, and rigidly interdicted from appearing in the drawing-room, except, perhaps, for a few minutes after dinner; when she would be set down to play on the piano, just to begin and take off the edge of other ladies' shyness; and since she has been at Moor Park, though I have seen her, certainly, when I have called, her mother has entirely monopolized the conversation, so that I have had no opportunity of judging of her talents, but, as far as my physiognomical skill goes, I should say she was sensible rather than clever, and good-tempered rather than brilliant or witty—but come and see her, and you can judge for yourself."

"But what made her settle at Moor Park?"

"Heaven knows! there are one or two marriageable men about, whom she perhaps thinks she may catch for her daughters. Perhaps it was the beauty of the place and neighbourhood that determined her."

"Well, it is a pretty drive, at any rate," said Ferdinand; "and my curiosity is rather excited, so suppose we drive there this afternoon."

"Do," said Lord Abbotsham; "and now I must be off—so good bye. I am glad to have found you so much better."

Soon after Lord Abbotsham's departure, the pony phaeton was driven round to the door. It was the first time that Ferdinand had attempted to drive the ponies since his accident, and Louisa naturally felt rather nervous about it. Her father, however, had laughed at her fears, saying that he must drive again some day or another, and might as well begin at once. He however, took the precaution of having the ponies well exercised before he started.

The phaeton had been considerably damaged by the accident ; but by this time it had been repaired, and the ponies, only one of which had been seriously injured had quite recovered. The day was fine and hot ; but as they drove along, the air that met them prevented their feeling the heat at all oppressive ; the lanes, moreover being well shaded by the trees that grew in the hedgerows. It was, in fact, a charming summer's day, and the country through which they drove was of a peculiarly pretty and picturesque description. At first, Louisa's enjoyment was of a very mixed character. She could not get over her dread of the ponies, which had caused her so much grief and anxiety. After a time, however, as she perceived that everything went on smoothly, and that Mr. Castleton, though he had not yet quite recovered his strength, had the ponies under perfect command, her fears abated and she began to enjoy the rapid motion of the carriage, to admire the beauty of

the scenery, which she did with something of an artist's eye, for, in addition to her other accomplishments, she was no mean proficient in the art of sketching from nature.

"Look, papa, how beautifully that rock projects from the side of that hill, standing out so boldly in its gray and hoary outlines from the green slope behind it."

"It is indeed a very picturesque object," said her father, "but I never see it without thinking of something besides its beauty. That rock is of a perfectly distinct character from those which form the hills behind and around it. They are of sandstone—and it is called Traver-tine, and is one of the largest deposits of that rock in the country."

"But how did it get there, papa, if it is so different from the others in the neighbourhood."

"It is formed here by the small stream which you may see there gliding down beside it and sparkling in the sun. That

little rivulet is impregnated in the bowels of the earth with carbonate of lime ; when it comes to the surface, it gives out its carbon to the atmosphere, and the remaining earthy particles are there deposited. And this work has been going on for ages after ages, until that vast rock that you see there has been formed."

" But is it then still growing ?"

" The work doubtless still goes on—but the quantity formed in any man's life-time is so inconsiderable as to be quite inappreciable."

" But what an enormous period of time must thus have elapsed, since the rock first began to be formed ; I can hardly bring into my imagination such a vast quantity of years."

" Probably, at some former period of the world's existence, the work may have gone on more rapidly than it now does ; but even, making every allowance for this and other accidents, the period that has elapsed must be enormous. It is one of

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those measures which occasionally present themselves to our notice, by which we are enabled to form some vague idea of the extent of time ; and when we think of the countless ages during which that piece of rock has been in process of formation, how insignificant does man's brief span of existence appear ! It is one of the modes in which we may form some approach to an idea of infinity. When we think how small is the duration of our existence, nay the existence of our whole race, when compared with that of that rock ; and yet that even that space, which our minds can but imperfectly grasp, is but a point in the sight of God, an inappreciable atom in the boundless ocean of infinity !”

Louisa was silent for some moments, and then resumed,—“ I have never been quite able to understand how it is that you, papa, and many other good and clever people, are convinced of the enormous lapse of time between the first creation of the world and that of our race,

while the first chapter of Genesis, which, of course, you believe to be inspired, tells us that everything, man included, was made in six days? ”

“ The whole question is, indeed, surrounded with difficulty ; but there is one point clear,—there are two books ; the book of inspiration, and the book of nature : both are, in fact, books of God, and both must be true. We may err in our interpretation either of the one or of the other, and may therefore find it difficult to reconcile apparently conflicting statements ; but, because it is difficult, and because we cannot always do it, it does not follow that it is impossible ; and, in the mean time, I cannot think it either necessary or right to refuse to study the book of nature, because at first it appears to contradict our pre-conceived notions of the statements of the book of inspiration. Were we to do so, how many valuable discoveries, which have ultimately tended exclusively to the greater glory of God,

would have been missed. It is, of course, still worse to follow the example of those who refuse to believe the book of inspiration, because it appears contrary to what they think they read in the book of nature. We should read both, study both, and if any apparent discrepancy occurs, which we cannot remove, attribute the defect to our own blindness, and not to the errors of the books, which are both inscribed by an all-wise hand. But see how our argument has beguiled the time ; we are just arrived at Moor Park. I confess I am looking forward with some curiosity to seeing this lady, of whom Abbotsham has given us such a description."

"I am sure I shall like Miss Vernon," said Louisa. "Poor thing ! I pity her so much ; and, from what Uncle Abbotsham said of her looking so good-tempered and amiable, I am sure she must be a very good girl ; for, to be placed in such a situation as hers, must be very trying to the temper ; and from what we hear of her mother, she was not likely to have had

any very great care bestowed upon her education."

"As for that, she may, perhaps, have had a good governess; and, if not, it is astonishing how, sometimes, the good seed will spring up under apparently the most disadvantageous circumstances; but do not be rash Louisa, and bestow your friendship on Miss Vernon till you know something more certain of her. At present you know, we have only your uncle's physiognomical skill, as he calls it, to depend upon."

"Well, papa, Uncle Abbotsham, is a good observer, and I have great faith in physiognomy. However, I will promise to reserve my decision, as far as I can; and, after all, she must be five or six years my senior; so that it will be her place—not mine—to make the advances, and perhaps she will not like me."

As she thus spoke, they drew up at the door of the house. The enquiry, "Is Mrs. Vernon at home?" was answered in the affirmative.

## CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Mr. Castleton and Louisa were ushered into the drawing room, they found it occupied by Mrs. Vernon and her eldest daughter. Mrs. Vernon was rather above than below the middle size, with a slight, very slight, tendency to *embonpoint*. Her age could not well be less than two or three and forty, but she managed to look some years younger. She was, in truth, in a state of very excellent preservation. Her glossy black hair, braided smoothly down on each side of her face, showed not any tinge of grey. Her large dark eyes

had lost none of their youthful lustre ; they were, in fact, by far the best, if not the only good, feature in her face. Her skin was still perfectly smooth, and the colour that dwelt upon her cheeks, if, indeed, it were her own—which some people were ill-natured enough to doubt—was of the purest pink. Her nose, however, was a failure. It was too *retrousse'*, and far too broad and thick to be pretty ; while the corners of her lips, rosy as they were, being turned very much down, gave a sinister expression to her mouth, and consequently, to her whole countenance ; for there is no feature that determines the cast of the countenance so completely as the mouth. Talk as we will of the beauty of eyes, the expanse of forehead, the finely cut nose,—it is the mouth, after all, that gives the expression, and determines whether the countenance, as a whole, shall be pleasing or not. Ferdinand's first impression certainly was, in this instance, that it was not. She, however, received him

with one of her sunniest smiles, saying how glad she was to see one of whom she had heard so much, "not only since your accident," she continued, "though that has been the chief topic of conversation in the county ever since it occurred; but previously to that, I assure you, I was not slow in finding out how highly you were estimated in the neighbourhood. Besides, you know I am honoured with the acquaintance of your noble brother, Lord Abbotsham. I hope he is quite well. And so this is your daughter," continued the voluble lady; "I should have guessed as much from the resemblance she bears to yourself. How charming it must be to see such a beautiful image of oneself constantly before one." (This was a sly cut at poor Susan, who was standing awkwardly behind her mother, not venturing to offer her salutations till her mother had done speaking.) "Come here, my dear," she continued; "I must introduce you to my daughter. I hope you will be great friends,

for I am sure any one, who has been educated as you have been, must be a most desirable companion for any girl. Unfortunately, I have only Susan at home at present. My Isabella is gone out to walk with her governess. She will be your best friend, I have no doubt, as she is more your own age, while Susan here is so much older. Besides, I think you would get on better with Isabella ; she is so lively—such spirits. However, as she is not here, you must begin with Susan. Susan, where are you ? Oh ! there, just behind my back, of course. Why don't you come forward, and speak to Miss Castleton ?”

Susan, thus addressed, came timidly forward, and muttered some broken words of civility to her new acquaintance, who, with all her preconceived determination to like her, could not avoid thinking that, to be sure, she did look rather awkward and ungainly, and that, if her mother had set her heart upon seeing her admired, and “ run



after" in the world, she did not wonder that she was disappointed. She felt, however, at the same time, that this was no excuse for her being unkind to her daughter; and as she saw in Mrs. Vernon's manner a desire to mortify her daughter before company, she determined to do her best to prevent her feeling the mortification. But Louisa was still very young to play company; and though her living so constantly in the society of her father had rendered her far more conversable, and far less shy than most girls of her age, she still felt rather unequal to keeping up the onus of a conversation which Miss Vernon did not seem equal to undertake of herself. The conversation, therefore, at first was not very lively, and Louisa had plenty of opportunity of examining her companion's face and features.

Susan Vernon certainly was not in the least like her mother. Her face was long and pallid; her eyes small, grey, and lustreless; her hair of a light brown, but,

on either side of her face. Her hair, however, was fine and straight, this particular, she had much the advantage of her mother; while her nose, which was small, would have been better had her lips been rather fuller and more rosy. Her hands, too, were so very pretty; and when an accidental glance revealed her foot and ankle, it was seen that they corresponded with

While Louisa and Susan were conversing, rather unsuccessfully, making some progress in their acquaintance, Ferdinand enquired of Mrs. Vernon if she admired the beauty of the scenery which her place was surrounded by.

“ Oh, indeed, yes, it is beautiful,” she replied: “ and I am so fond of

in the midst of such a pretty country. Do you sketch, Mr. Castleton ?”

“No, I do not myself, now. I have no time, and I have never followed up the pursuit since I was quite a young man ; but my daughter is very fond of it.”

“Oh ! how very delightful. Your papa was saying, Miss Castleton, that you are fond of sketching ; it is such a nice amusement in the country. Susan does not sketch. I often wanted her to learn, but she always says she has no talent for it. But I think people who live in the country really ought to sketch. It is such a pleasure, not only to oneself, but to one’s friends, you know.”

“Why, as to that,” said Ferdinand, smiling, and anxious to relieve poor Susan, who looked guilty and embarrassed, “I do not think that it is *always* exactly an unmixed pleasure to one’s friends. It is all very well to look over a portfolio of sketches, but a sketching companion is, to those who do not sketch themselves,

sometimes an insufferable bore. I do not mean anything personal to Louisa," he added, "for she has plenty of opportunities for sketching while I am otherwise engaged; but, in my younger days, I remember once making a short tour with a sketching friend, and the hours that he used to keep me dancing attendance, while he was making a drawing of some old wall, or rock, or waterfall, were tedious beyond expression."

"Oh, but then I did not mean exactly that. I meant that when I have been staying some time in a beautiful country like this, I think it so pleasant to be able to carry away some memento with me; which I should do, if any one belonging to me had talent enough to be able to draw."

Ferdinand, seeing that it was useless to contend with the lady, turned the conversation, which flowed on agreeably enough for a time, till music came under discussion, upon which Mrs. Vernon again addressed Louisa, who had just succeeded in estab-

lishing something like a conversation with her companion.

"I'm sure, Miss Castleton, you are fond of music, and play beautifully ; now don't you ?"

"I am very fond of music, certainly ; but as for my playing, I have nothing to boast of at all."

"Oh, that's only your modesty. I am sure you can play divinely, and it must be such a pleasure to you, Mr. Castleton, to have a daughter who can gratify you at all times by playing your favourite airs. I am sure the mint of money I have spent in trying to give Susan a taste for music, cannot be told ; but she never seems to take any pleasure in it, so that it is quite an annoyance to be obliged to ask her to play, so that I had better have employed my money and her time in something else."

Mr. Castleton, who had a particular dislike to this species of cutting sarcasm, and constant insinuation, directed against

any one, especially if they were present, here took the bold step of saying to Mrs. Vernon that his daughter was so fond of gardens and flowers that, if she would allow her to step out with Miss Vernon, it would be doing her a real kindness.

Louisa caught eagerly at the idea, and Miss Vernon ran up stairs and put on her bonnet, and, returning to the drawing-room, ushered her new friend into the gardens.

Then, relieved from the presence of her mother, she seemed to breathe more freely, and open out more readily to the advances of her companion. ;

“Are you really not fond of music?” inquired the latter, after they had walked side by side for some minutes.

“Yes ; I believe I really am fond of it, that is, if I could play what I liked, when I like, where I like, and how I like. But it is not agreeable to be set down to play a piece for which one has not the slightest taste, before a bevy of people, who are

only thinking of criticising the faults one is sure to make in the execution."

"But do you never play by yourself, for your own amusement?"

"Sometimes, when I am in spirits ; but I seldom have time, as I am obliged to employ most of my leisure time in practising the difficult things that I have to play whenever mamma has a dinner-party."

"Poor thing!" muttered Louisa; "I don't wonder you are not fond of music, under these circumstances."

Louisa felt very much inclined to ask her if her mother was always as unkind to her as she had appeared to be during her visit ; but she thought their short acquaintance hardly warranted such an inquiry, so she merely said—

"But I suppose you have a good deal of time that you can employ as you like?"

Susan only smiled sadly, and shook her head.

"Then, in order to change the subject, she said—

my mother, especially if they were present, were that the first step of saying to Mrs. Vernon that her daughter was so fond of gardens and flowers that if she would allow her to stay out with Miss Vernon, it would be doing her a real kindness.

Louise caught eagerly at the idea, and Miss Vernon ran up stairs and put on her bonnet and retreating to the drawing-room, introduced her new friend into the garden.

Then, relieved from the presence of her mother, she seemed to breathe more freely, and gave out more readily to the advances of her companion.

"Are you really not fond of music?" inquired the latter, after they had walked side by side for some minutes.

"Yes; I believe I really am fond of it, that is, if I could play what I liked, when I like, where I like, and how I like. But it is not agreeable to be set down to play a piece for which one has not the slightest taste, before a bevy of people, who are



through the wet. If it were any one else, we really should feel quite confused by our obligations to him ; but he is so generous and so good, that it seems to come quite as natural to him to do self-sacrificing actions, as it is to some other people to do selfish ones. And then he is so completely one of our family, that it seemed as if he had only done his duty, as he would, if it had been his own father who had been in danger. But have you never seen Mr. Wentworth, Miss Vernon ?”

“ No, I never have seen him myself. He called here once, but we were not at home ; and mamma asked him to dinner, but he said he was engaged, so that we never have met. But I have heard a good deal of him ; for his connexion with Mr. Castleton’s accident, or rather with his recovery from that accident, has caused him to be much talked of. And is he, indeed, as good as you say ?”

“ Ask papa,” replied Louisa, “ and he will say quite as much as I do of him ; for

I know that he thinks most highly of him, both as a gentleman and as a clergyman. During all papa's illness he had, of course, the entire care of the parish; and now that papa is beginning to get about again a little himself, he says it is quite delightful to hear how all the poor people speak of Mr. Wentworth. In fact, papa says there is no one whom he could so comfortably entrust with the care of his parish as Mr. Wentworth."

"It must then be a great blessing and comfort to you both to have him so constantly with you; for it must be very agreeable to you, I should think, as well as useful to your father; for people say that besides his professional qualifications, Mr. Wentworth is a remarkably agreeable man."

"So he is, I believe; you know I am so young that I do not very well know what people call being agreeable. But I know that I could listen to papa and Mr. Wentworth talking together for hours without

being tired. And I know papa thinks him excessively well informed, if not clever."

"Well," thought Susan to herself, as they returned towards the house, "one thing is certain, she is in love with this Wentworth, or, if not, she will be." And yet Susan was wrong, at any rate in her first assumption. Louisa was not in the least in love with Mr. Wentworth ; whether she will be, time must show.

When they arrived at the house, they found Mr. Castleton quite ready to depart, and he and Louisa accordingly took their leave of Mrs. Vernon and her daughter, and getting into their carriage, turned their ponies' heads once more in the direction of Shelbridge.

When they had got well out of the place, Louisa asked her father what he thought of their new acquaintances ?

"Well, my dear, I cannot say the lady made a very favourable impression upon me. In fact, I should hardly be inclined

to subscribe to Abbotsham's opinion, that she was very agreeable. She is very voluble, certainly; and, as he says, 'very easy in hand;' but something more than that is necessary to warrant me in pronouncing a person agreeable: and I cannot say that I should be inclined to stamp her with that designation."

"How, then, do you define 'agreeableness;' or, to speak more correct English, what qualities do you consider necessary to render a person agreeable?"

"There are few things so difficult to define; for after one has named a variety of ingredients, they may perhaps, after all, fail to make a person agreeable. However, I will try to name a few; though I daresay you will find several objections to urge against many of them. In the first place, a person wishing to be agreeable—but that puts me in mind of a preliminary quality, so to speak, which is, that a person must *wish* to be agreeable; and this *wish* is, after all, perhaps one of the most

important steps towards being so. It is undeniably an indispensable one ; for I defy any one to be agreeable who is not inspired with the desire to please."

"I shall not quarrel with that ingredient, papa, at any rate ; but do you think Mrs. Vernon has that desire to please ? "

"Decidedly she has ; not from any motive of kindness or amiability, but from a desire to appear to advantage in the eyes of her acquaintance. She, therefore, has not *always* the desire—witness her behaviour to her daughter. She evidently has no wish to please her ; and to her, her manner is, I should think, decidedly not agreeable."

"Well, granting that the first ingredient, as you call it, indispensable preliminary, is the wish to please. What will you give me as the next ? "

"The quality that I was going to put first, but which must now come second, is that which Mrs. Vernon undoubtedly possesses in a very great degree, and which

can hardly be better expressed than your uncle's phrase of 'easy in hand'—that which gives that facility of carry on a conversation—of prolonging or ject or suggesting fresh ones—u which no person can be a strictly able companion, as we are now standing the word agreeable; in stricted sense, that is, of agreeable conversation."

"That seems so great a point, that, with that and your 'indispe preliminary,' I should have thought could hardly have missed being agreeable."

"And yet Mrs. Vernon has missed at least, in my opinion. But I will give you some qualities necessary to a person being agreeable, which she wants. (1) a power of adapting one's conversation to the ideas and trains of thought of the companion. Without that, no person can be really and *generally* agreeable; though they may be considered so in their peculiar set, where the topics of con-

tion are confined within a small circle. But a person has no claim to be considered agreeable who, for instance, can only talk of balls and parties to a country clergyman; or who can only talk of schools and charities when thrown amongst more worldly society. To be really agreeable, we ought to be able to be 'all things to all men;' to adapt our conversation to the society in which we find ourselves, as the chameleon adapts its colour to the trees on which it climbs."

"But is not that hypocrisy, or something very like it?"

"By no means. The individuality of the character need never be lost sight of; and a man may speak his real opinions on any subject, though he may adapt the subject of his conversation to those amongst whom he is thrown."

"But it must be very difficult always to do that; one is so inclined to talk of what one is most interested about."

"But without difficulty, where would

be the excellence? A *perfectly* agreeable person is a most rare thing to meet with; and the attainment of perfection in that, as in every other case, must be a matter of difficulty. But I have still another higher quality to add to my agreeable person:—he must not only be able to talk on all subjects, but to talk *well*; that is, he must have the power of uttering things which are not mere common-places, but which shew thought on his part, and deserve attention on the part of his listener.”

“In order to be perfectly agreeable then, papa, a man must be thoroughly well-informed on a great variety of subjects; have the tact to see what subjects are most adapted to his companions; possess the faculty of expressing himself well and clearly; with a quick perception of the connection of ideas and topics, so as never to be at a loss either to continue one subject or to start a fresh one; and, in addition to all this, he must, above all, have a real desire to please. Is that your estimate?”



"Pretty well ; but, besides that, he must know not only what to say, but what to leave unsaid ; so as never either to hurt his listener's feelings, or to try his patience. In fact, he must be endowed with excellent tact ; and there, I think, you have my portrait of a perfectly agreeable person."

"Well, papa, all I can say is, that, if all that is necessary, I am sure *I* shall never be an agreeable person !"

"Don't despair, darling. Remember, you are very young yet ; and I see no reason why you should not, in course of time, be, at all events, a *very*, if not a *perfectly* agreeable woman. You have a great desire to please — not from Mrs. Vernon's motives, but from a real desire to see people happy and comfortable about you. You have a great variety of general information, which you have picked up at odd times ; and I have no reason to suppose that you are deficient either in tact or in the power of connecting ideas together, so as to pass from one subject to

another. Your mother was considered one of the most agreeable young ladies in London, and those qualities are apt to be hereditary."

"I am sure, papa, I hope I shall justify your prognostications. But tell me, do you think that Mr. Wentworth is an agreeable person?"

"In the sense we have been using the term, and speaking quite *generally*, I should say *not*. There is no one whom I prefer as a companion to Wentworth. To me he is decidedly agreeable; but in general society I do not think he would be considered so."

"Why not, papa?"

"In the first place, he is decidedly shy and a person who is shy can never be agreeable, so long as his shyness lasts."

"But do not you think his shyness may wear off? I am sure he is not shy with us."

"It is possible that if he had been thrown very much into society, his shyness

might have worn off; but, as it is, I do not think he will ever shake it off, unless he is received on the same habits of intimacy that he is with us."

"But is that the *only* reason for not thinking him agreeable?"

"No; another reason is, that I do not think he has the faculty either of originating subjects for conversation, or of adopting them when they chance to present themselves. In his intercourse with me, who am so much his senior, and to whom he looks up, he is accustomed to let me suggest topics; and then, I grant, he generally has plenty to say upon them. But, in general society, a man cannot always depend on finding that burden taken off his hands; so far from it, indeed, that one of the most necessary arts to acquire, in order to be agreeable, is the faculty of originating ideas and topics readily, easily, and naturally."

"But can that art never be acquired?"

"Certainly, in a great measure it may,

and it is one that mere habit and practice will frequently confer; but it requires a certain degree of innate talent to work upon—”

“ Which you think Mr. Wentworth has not ? ”

“ I do not say that. I am far from saying that Wentworth will never be an agreeable man, or that, had his course of life been different, he might not have been so even at this time. I only speak of the present; and all that I say is, that Wentworth, as he is at present, would not be considered an agreeable man in general society. But, tell me, what did you think of your new acquaintance? I certainly pitied her very much, when I saw how her mother bullied her; but I did not think she seemed likely to be a very agreeable companion.’ ’

“ Well, papa, I assure you I thought so too, and I was afraid that my resolution to like her would be sorely tried; but

when we were out in the garden we got on much better, and there is a sweetness and resignation about her which I think very attractive ; and when I asked her if she had no time to herself that she could call her own, she shook her head and smiled so sadly, that I was almost inclined to cry, I really think that I shall like her very much when we become better acquainted, though how that is to be brought about I am sure I don't know ; for I suppose Mr. Vernon cannot return your visit, and I do not think you will be inclined to repeat it very soon—eh, papa dear ?”

“ I cannot say I derived much pleasure from it myself, certainly ; but, perhaps, if you really find you like Miss Vernon, we may ask her to come and spend a few days with you at Shelbridge. But, perhaps, after all, you may like her sister, whom you have not yet seen, better.”

“ I think *not*, papa. Uncle Abbotsham said she was very much after her mother's

heart, and I am sure that must be something disagreeable. And then, I think if she had been 'nice,' Miss Ver would have mentioned her in some way other."

**PART II.**

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**THE RECTORY.**

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**CHAPTER I.**

THREE years have elapsed since the conclusion of our last chapter. Three years! How differently does the lapse of time appear to different people, or to the same people, under different circumstances. At some periods of our life three years seem to have made no difference in us, and the events of three years back appear to have

occurred as yesterday. At others, the same period seems to have included the events of a whole life ; and when we compare what we are *now* with what we were *then*, we are almost tempted to doubt our own individuality.

In the three years which are just concluded, some of us have sprung from youth into manhood ; the boy just leaving school has become the man, fitted to encounter and struggle with the manifold evils of the world—to steer his tiny bark amongst the stormy waves of the wide ocean of life.

The gay and thoughtless girl has become the sober, happy wife—the twice-blessed but doubly anxious mother—or, it may be the heart-broken mourner ;—mourner for the dead, mourner, perchance, for the faithless living.

The rich and opulent man, who did not know what it was to deny himself a luxury, has become the poor and needy pensioner on the bounties of others, ignorant where to look for his next day's meal ; while the



former hanger-on of his bounty may be in position to dispense that charity he was wont to crave.

Three short years may have made the thoughtless prudent, and the scoffer devout ; they may have brought joy to them that mourned, and grief to them that were gay. In most of us they have worked some change, either in our outward circumstances or in our inward disposition. To all they should suggest the important question, "How have we used them?" To many they must furnish the terrible answer, "How we have misused them!"

To the party at Shelbridge the three years last past had produced little outward change. Mr. Castleton had entirely recovered his health, and was the same active, zealous pastor as heretofore. Wentworth still continued to be his curate. He might have obtained some lucrative appointments, but he preferred remaining where he was until he could obtain the offer of such a living as would be a perma-

ment establishment for him, and on which he might be able to marry ; the vision, which the thought of that contingency conjured up, being uniformly the image of Louisa Castleton, with whom he had long since confessed to himself he was most decidedly in love.

It would, indeed, have been difficult for any one to have avoided it, thrown much as Wentworth into the society one possessed of such an angelic disposition and such surpassing loveliness Louisa Castleton. She had now completed her seventeenth year, and her beauty more than fulfilled the promise that it had given when first we introduced her to our readers.

She was, indeed, the image of her mother, with the exception that there was, perhaps, a slightly graver cast of countenance. The likeness was so strong, that it often brought tears into Ferdinand's eyes as he gazed upon her, and his thoughts flew back to times gone by.

He thought of how he had won her mother's affections at that age, and had fondly hoped to preserve her as the companion of his life ; and the thought would sometimes intrude that, as she had been taken from him by death, so his daughter would possibly, ere long, be taken from him by marriage. He had not failed to observe the devotion of Wentworth. His own experience had taught him the marks whereby to detect the concealed passion. If his daughter returned the attachment, the marriage would be far from disagreeable to him. In the first place, it could not take place yet, as Wentworth would not marry till he got a good living ; and a respite would, therefore, be afforded him, before he would be called upon to part with her. In the second place, he was thoroughly acquainted with Wentworth's character, and knew that it was of a nature to give every possible guarantee for his daughter's happiness, while her station in life as his wife would be precisely that

to which she had been accustomed. He, therefore, watched Louisa narrowly, to discover if there was anything like love on her side—but there his penetration was baffled. He saw nothing but the gay—unconstrained familiarity, which she manifested towards one whom she had known so intimately from childhood. He became tolerably convinced that she did not know that she loved him ; but his own experience again taught him, that some sudden accident, or unforeseen occurrence might enlighten her as to the state of her own heart, with all the vividness of the lightning-flash, but without its transiency. He, therefore, thought it extremely probable that she might love him ; and with this assurance he was tolerably content.

Not so Wentworth. The matter to him was of far too vital importance to be so readily dismissed ; and a thousand times a day did he put to himself the question,—“ Does she, can she, will she love me ? ”

At times the kindliness of her manner towards him, the evident pleasure she took in his conversation, the undisguised regret with which she viewed his departure, if any engagement took him away from Shelbridge for a few days, and the evident gladness with which she welcomed his return—made him also believe that his ardent hopes had some foundation in reason ; but then the very fact that her feelings were so open and undisguised—the very frankness and familiarity of her manner towards him—made him tremble. He felt sure that she liked him ; he doubted greatly whether she loved him. Whether her liking would ever become love was the momentous question that he over and over again asked himself. He sometimes thought that doubtless any other suitor for Miss Castleton's affection would envy him the constant opportunities that he enjoyed of ingratiating himself with her. Then, again, he would think he was a fool for not appreciating the advantages he

really possessed. And between these conflicting feelings he knew not what to hope, what to fear, what to think. But independently of the doubt which hung over his prospect of success with Miss Castleton, there was another grave difficulty, which, he could not conceal from himself, might have a serious influence over his prospects. Miss Castleton was not only the daughter of the rector of Shelbridge, who, as such, might consider it no unequal match to connect herself with one who was sprung from a good stock, who, could he get a living of moderate value, would be able to maintain her in the same condition of life to which she had been accustomed—but she was also the grand-daughter of the Right Honourable the Earl of Stapleford, of Stapleford Castle, and half-a-dozen places besides. Lord Abbotsham had now been married nearly four years, and had had no issue. Failing him and his issue, the title and estates would descend to Ferdi.

nand, after whose death the title would go to a very distant branch of the family, while nearly the whole of the estates would devolve upon Louisa, who would thus become an immense heiress ; and whose chance of becoming so was already sufficiently great to exercise a material influence on her prospects and on his hopes ; for could he, a younger son, with nothing but a younger son's portion, and the hope of a living, presume to aspire to the hand of the probable heiress of the Stapleford estates ? and if he did so, and ran the risk of being stigmatized as a fortune-hunter, would he succeed ?—would he not meet with formidable rivals in a host of men, who would besiege the heiress, and whose qualifications would be more likely to meet with favour in her sight than those possessed by him, the poor country curate ?

All these doubts, fears, and anxieties, had been pressing more and more heavily upon Wentworth's mind during the past three years ; and the happiness of his ex-

istence would, doubtless, have been unbittered by them, had it not been that the increasing pleasure, that he took in Louise's society, more, far more than made up for the trouble that it brought upon him. And thus a merciful dispensation of providence seems ever to ordain that there shall be a pleasure in loving, even when we are uncertain whether our love is returned, that, as long as hope remains, more than a compensation for all the pangs it causes to our hearts. There is no doubt that any lover, however despairing, however racked by every torture of jealousy, fear, or despondency, if he were offered by some fairy a relief from all his ills by a potion which would altogether destroy his love, would unhesitatingly refuse the proffered boon. Even when hope is past, when the beloved one is shrouded in the tomb, or given to the arms of another, we doubt whether any one would wish to forget the love that he had borne her.



But there was yet another individual, on whose career the events of the last three years had exercised no inconsiderable influence. Susan Vernon, spite of the difficulties which Louisa Castleton had indicated to her father, had continued to find opportunities of improving their acquaintance, till it had ripened into a friendship of the most sincere and lasting description.

Louisa had found that her new friend, as soon as her shyness and awkwardness had worn off, was endowed with no ordinary amount of good and amiable qualities, amply sufficient to atone for deficiency in talent, had any such existed,—which was not really the case. Constantly “snubbed” and kept in the back ground by her mother, her more brilliant qualities were prevented from appearing, and, by want of exercise, had fallen, as it were, into abeyance; but she was, nevertheless, endowed with no inconsiderable amount of cleverness of a peculiar kind, coupled with

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~~possessing~~.

The two first seasons of her appearance  
 in London had been productive of great  
 mortification to her, and she always looks  
 forward with the greatest eagerness to the

return to the country, when she would again have the opportunity of seeing Miss Castleton. She looked forward with such dismay to the going through another, that Louisa persuaded her father to invite her to come and stay at Shelbridge while her mother and sister went to London. The request was made and readily granted. Mrs. Vernon was only too glad to be rid of a daughter who was a burden to her, and imposed on her the necessity of having two young ladies to *chaperone*. After expressing her surprise that any one could wish to be bored with Susan's company for three whole months, she made no further objection; and, to Susan's inexpressible delight, she was installed as an inmate of Shelbridge Rectory, while her mother and sister prepared to plunge afresh into the vortex of London society. Louisa, too, was very much pleased. Although the companionship of her father was, beyond expression, agreeable to her, there were many hours when he was too busily

assigned in his professional pursuits to be able to give himself up to the pleasure of her society. And, besides, however highly prized a father's affection may be, there is something in a young girl's heart which longs for the sympathizing companionship of a female friend. Some, there are fortunate enough to find this in a mother—some in a sister: but Louisa Castleton had neither mother nor sister, and from ordinary girlish intimacies with any of the neighbours her father had carefully guarded her, so that it was a real pleasure to her to obtain the friendship of one whom her own heart taught her to love, and of whom her father's severer judgment did not disapprove.

Two of the three months appointed for Susan's sojourn at the Rectory had already slipped away, and all parties had had the rare gratification of finding their anticipations of pleasure more than verified. Susan, in particular, had tasted enjoyment such as had seldom fallen to her lot. To

find herself no longer looked down upon, carped at, sneered at, rebuked, nay, sometimes almost abused, as if she were a being of an inferior mould to her mother and sister ;—but, instead of this, to be treated as the friend, the equal of those whom her judgment told her were as far superior to her mother and sister as *they* imagined themselves to be to *her*,—was to experience a hitherto untasted happiness. It restored her to that place in her own esteem which she had hitherto forfeited, and by giving her confidence in herself removed many of the causes which contributed, even more than her want of beauty, to mar her powers of pleasing.

Wentworth had, at first, been very jealous of this new friend, thinking that she would absorb Louisa's attention, and deprive him of many opportunities of enjoying her society ; but he soon found that his fears were unfounded, and that so far from such being the case, his opportunities were rather increased, inasmuch as

There were many occasions when he could join the young ladies when they were together. When, had Miss Castleton been alone, it would not have been correct for him to do so. In the present state of affairs between him and Louisa, a *tête-à-tête*, while it would have been incorrect, would have been useless. He had no intention of addressing her in the language of affection. And on the few occasions that accident had left them alone together for a few minutes he had felt so shy and *géné* that he could not talk even as well as usual on ordinary subjects.

To him, therefore, Susan's presence was no restraint. He soon ceased to think her a bore, and the transition was very easily made from not disliking to liking. A friend of Louisa's—when he had overcome his jealousy—was likely to find favour in his sight. He had, moreover, heard her story, and become much interested in her; and he readily entered into Louisa's wish to make her friend's sojourn at Shelbridge

as agreeable as possible. He therefore exerted himself more than usual to please her. He felt that in doing so he pleased Louisa, while at the same time his kind heart felt a real pleasure in adding, in however small a degree, to the happiness of a fellow-creature. He had, moreover, neither the wish nor the intention of paying his addresses openly to Louisa ; so that, in point of fact, his attentions were very fairly divided between the two ladies ; and though, to an unprejudiced observer, it would be evident that Louisa had the lion's share, still Susan was so little accustomed to receive any, that her portion appeared to her far greater than it was in reality. This, as may be imagined, was no slight addition to her enjoyment, while her presence undoubtedly, in some degree, was a gratification to Wentworth, to whom, therefore, the new state of things at Shelbridge was far from disagreeable.

In fact, two months have seldom been enjoyed more thoroughly than they were

by three out of the four parties who commonly assembled at the parsonage ; for though Wentworth nominally had a lodging of his own in the village, he was scarcely ever, except when engaged in his parochial occupations, absent from the rectory. Ferdinand Castleton himself—though from him the faculty of “thoroughly enjoying” anything, as the words are understood by the young and gay, had departed for ever—found no slight degree of happiness in contemplating that of those around him. Seeing his child happy was to him the greatest happiness earth could now afford. His love for her had grown with her growth, and strengthened with her strength, till it had become almost a passion. Every event that occurred was viewed by him through the medium of his love for her, and was counted fortunate or otherwise, as he considered it likely to conduce to, or detract from, her happiness. He feared sometimes that he loved her too much ; but such a sin, if, indeed, it ex-



isted, may surely be pardoned in him, who beheld in her not only the image of her whose memory he still treasured in his heart of hearts ; not only a being adorned with every grace of person and every beauty of disposition—but one whom his own care and tending had reared to be what she was. He could point out her virtues, and say, “These are the fruits, under God, of my careful training.” He could call to mind how he had checked in the bud every evil disposition, and how he had fostered and encouraged every development of amiability ; how he had inculcated self-command, and urged her to self-sacrifice. She, beautiful and glorious as she was, was *his* work. Had Ferdinand been a less devout man, he might have gloried in the result of his labour and anxiety ; as it was, he thanked God fervently that it had pleased Him so to bless it. But, mindful as he was that all the good came from God, he would have been more than human had he not felt some little pride and satis-

faction in beholding such a trophy of a strict discharge of the most difficult of father's duties—the education of a daughter when the mother is no longer at hand to assist. So it was, at any rate. He gloried in her ; she was his joy, the light of his dwelling, and the object of a love almost more than paternal.

In seeing her happiness, therefore, his own was materially increased ; and thus it was that the sunny two months, which had slipped by with such marvellous rapidity, had been productive of a greater amount of happiness to the party at Shebridge than ordinarily falls to the share of four mere mortals in this world, where alas ! the clouds bear so large a proportion to the sunshine.

It was a beautiful evening, towards the end of the month of June. The dinner at the rectory, which, as was generally the case, had included Wentworth, was just over ; but the days being at their longest the sun had not yet set, and the trees were

flinging their lengthened shadows over the side of the hill on which the house stood, while many a cottage window, in the village at the bottom, glittered like a diamond, as it reflected back the slanting rays of the vanishing luminary. Though the day thus lingered, nature had well-nigh sunk into repose ; the song of the birds was hushed, save when a solitary thrush, perched on the back of a rustic seat, still poured forth his melodious notes. The drowsy hum of the cockchafer might occasionally be heard as he flew blindly by ; and the plaintive low of a cow in the pastures beneath was now and then audible. In a distant field, too, where the hay was not yet quite gathered in, the busy haymakers were striving to finish their task ere dark, and the sound of their voices, and their cries to the horses, came intermittingly upon the ear. The ceaseless splashing of the little rivulet, and the murmur of the gentle breezes that moved amongst the trees, and slowly stirred their

massive foliage, served only the more to mark the general stillness.

Susan and Louisa, having just left the dining-room, stepped out of the open window of the drawing-room, and, arm-in-arm, paced up and down the velvet-like turf which bordered the garden; enjoying the delicious coolness of the atmosphere, which they the more appreciated as the day had been hot and sultry.

“What a lovely evening, and how beautiful the valley looks!” said Susan. “Oh, my dearest Louisa! how can I ever feel sufficiently grateful to you for all the happiness that you and your good, kind papa have procured for me during the two last months!”

“Indeed, Susan, as far as I am concerned, you have no occasion to be grateful. I assure you I have been quite as much a gainer by your visit as you can have been. In the first place, the mere fact of having been able to contribute so much to your enjoyment would be reward

nough in itself; but, beyond that, the pleasure that I have derived from your companionship quite turns the scale. But, tell me, when you hear of Mr. Vernon and your sister being so gay in town, and going to so many grand parties, do you never envy them, and regret that you have wasted a whole season in an obscure country parsonage?"

"Oh! Louisa, you know that I do not; you know I hated London, and I would even have preferred being left by myself at Moor Park, than to have gone through another season there: how much more, then, when I have the pleasure of your sweet society!"

"But then, do you never think that, though you may be very happy in my sweet society, as you are pleased to call it, now, it can be of very little use to you in your future life; and that you are losing opportunities of forming advantageous connexions, which may not again be presented to you?"

"As for advantageous connexions, I have often heard people say that many more marriages are concocted in the country than in London."

"How your head runs upon marriages, Susan dear. I did not speak only of marriages, but of forming acquaintances amongst grand people, and obtaining a position, as people call it; though, indeed, as to marriages, I am afraid the saying you have quoted in favour of the country applies only to large country houses, where a great many people meet, and young people have great opportunities of making acquaintance with each other; but in this quiet parsonage, where we hardly see any one but ourselves and an occasional morning visitor, I am afraid you will not have much chance, unless, indeed, you marry Mr. Wentworth."

This shaft was let loose at random, and with so little thought of its hitting the mark, that Louisa did not raise her eyes to her companion's face. Had she done so,

she might perhaps have detected a transient flush, which passed across it for an instant and then vanished, leaving it pale as before.

“I do not think, nevertheless, that I lose much by not being in London in the season ; for there are two things necessary to obtaining a position, as you call it, either by marriage, or in any other way :—one is the opportunity of meeting people, the other the power of attracting them ; and the last is as necessary as the first.”

“What nonsense you talk, Susan ; as if you were not just as attractive as a host of other young ladies, and a great deal more so to those who know you well. It is only because your mother—”

“Please, dear, not to say any thing against my mother. She may sometimes appear unkind, but I am sure she really loves me ; and I can well excuse her for being disappointed at my want of the fascinations, on which she sets so high a value ?”

Louisa was silent. She respected Susan

for defending her mother, but she could not pretend herself to share in a sentiment which she did not feel.

After a short pause, Susan resumed,—  
“How far do you imagine that we shall recognize each other in the next world?”

“I certainly believe that we shall do so. I have often asked papa about it; and he says that though he does not think we have any strict warrant in Scripture for believing it, yet that there is certainly nothing to disprove it; and the belief is so generally implanted in our breasts, so associated with the idea of personal identity, and so connected with the best feelings of our hearts, that he can hardly doubt that it is so. But what made you think of that so suddenly?”

“You will think me very foolish; but I was thinking that if we were to recognize each other, we must be something like our present selves, and that the differences in appearance must still exist as they do here.”

“I will not say that I think you foolish;



certainly think you reason very

Even in this world we sometimes  
ople bearing a very strong resem-  
to each other, while one is hand-  
nd the other ugly ; but, even if we  
ever so much from our present  
that is no reason why we should be  
to recognize each other. Our fa-  
will all be so enlarged, that we  
ve the power given to us of mutual  
tion by a separate sense, of which  
world we have no idea."

ou think, then, that our bodies may  
different, not only in nature, but  
arance, from what they are now ?"

I have always thought that that was a  
autiful idea which was symbolized by  
ients, when they called the butter-  
yche ;' which, papa tells me, is  
word for the soul. It seems as if  
arvellous transformations of that  
nsect were ordained for the very  
e of making manifest to us the  
ous changes that may take place in

the nursery insect while personal identity remains. Nothing can be more certain than that the butterfly and the caterpillar, or grub, are the same animal; but what can be more different in appearance or in habits?

And it is not always the handsomest butterfly that makes the most beautiful nursery grub.

By no means. on the contrary, some of the most magnificent species of butterfly have the same of the most ordinary looking grubs. while the prettiest butterflies turn to nothing but dingy grubs. And so it will probably be with the rest. One may exceed the other in glory in the next world, but it by no means follows that the brilliant in this world should excel in the other also. There is indeed a great similarity in the two cases and the similarity holds—or may be presumed to hold—in so many points: their food, their desires, their powers of vision and locomotion, are so different, that

seems almost incredible that they can really be the same animal. See, here is a leaf with a little green caterpillar upon it. How slowly it moves!—how limited its senses!—how confined its range of ideas! This leaf, or at any rate this tree, is probably the boundary of its experience; to feed on it, its only desire; and yet, in a few months, it will be provided with wings; its rapidity of motion will be a thousand times greater than our own; its powers of vision will be intense; from eating voraciously of solid vegetable matter with its ponderous jaws, it will sip nothing but the nectar-drop from the flowers, with a long, flexible trunk; while, from the changes in its outward form, no one could recognize it, and yet its personal identity still continues. How far it has recollections of its former state, we know not. There the analogy ceases; for when, from the transformation of the body, we come to think of the change in the spirit, we may no longer compare ourselves with anything on the

such. We are alone, and have nothing in the shape of analogy ; but it is otherwise with the body ; and it does really seem to me that there is more than a fancied resemblance between our transformation and that of the butterfly."

"At any rate, the comparison certainly aids us in imagining the possibility of our outward shape, our wants and habits being completely changed, while our personal identity continues unimpaired. It is certainly an extremely satisfactory idea to me, for I confess I have been sometimes much puzzled in conceiving how this body which we know shall be raised again and reunited to our souls, could be adapted to our new state of existence without altogether losing its identity."

At this point in their conversation the ladies were met by Ferdinand and Wentworth, who joined them ; the former walking by the side of Susan, while Wentworth placed himself by that of Louisa.

"Well," said Louisa, laughing, "you

can hardly have made yourselves tipsy to-night. Susan and I have not had time to get through a quarter of our young lady conversation, and we did not expect to be interrupted so soon."

"Indeed," said Wentworth, "you cannot be surprised at *our* preferring such society to the greatest charms that the table can proffer. But if I find that I have intruded, my delight at the meeting will be changed into bitter disappointment and regret."

"Hear him, Susan," said Louisa, still laughing; "he speaks like a book. However," she continued, more gravely, and addressing Wentworth, whom she saw was almost inclined to look seriously annoyed—"I will spare you that anguish for the present, and tell you in all humility, that we are heartily glad to see you, more especially as we were getting rather out of our depth in our very metaphysical conversation."

"And what were you discussing, if I

"~~may ask?~~" interposed Mr. Castleton. "I thought you seemed very deeply interested, for you did not appear to see a ~~veil~~ ~~it~~ we were quite close to 'you, though it is still almost broad daylight."

"Why, papa, our conversation began ~~in~~ Susan's expressing extreme distress."

"Far shame, Louisa, to expose my ~~weakness~~. Pray miss that. Never mind how we came to the subject. You can tell them what the topic was, without embarrassing them as to the road by which we ~~arrived at it~~."

"Well, then, as Susan is so much ashamed of ~~her~~ ~~it~~, as I think she is quite right in being, I will draw a veil over her weakness and only tell you that we were discussing the transformation of the caterpillar into the butterfly, and comparing it to the change which our own bodies will one day undergo."

"It is indeed, a curious analogy," observed Mr. Castleton, "and really useful in this way: that it shews us that t

same body may not only be wonderfully different in outward appearance, and have wonderfully differing properties, but that its desires and wishes may be so opposite, while the personal identity remains the same. It is a practical answer to those who argue that because our souls will be re-united to our bodies, therefore we shall still be endued with something resembling our present earthly desires. Some even hold that, unless the mind is cultivated in this life, it will be unable to appreciate the wonderful designs of Providence which will probably be revealed to it in the next. That, in short, without a knowledge of astronomy and optics, we shall not appreciate rightly the marvels exhibited in the constitution of the universe. This simple resemblance proves the fallacy of the idea. For what does the caterpillar know of the objects which engage the attention of the butterfly? what idea can he form of the distant regions which he is afterwards destined to visit? and yet the

difference between the caterpillar and the butterfly is probably far less than will exist between our earthly and our heavenly being."

"You mean, papa, that the difference between our present and future capacities is so great, that that between a learned man and an ignorant one sinks into nothing in the comparison."

"Just so: and also that the acquisitions of science, delightful as they are to us here, will be utterly useless to us hereafter; and that the only wisdom which avails us anything, is the wisdom from above."

"But," said Susan, timidly, "it surely does not follow, Mr. Castleton, that, because the pursuits and enjoyment of the butterfly and caterpillar are so different that, *therefore*, ours must be so. The resemblance is, after all, merely hypothetical."

"Entirely so; and we can of course draw no inference from it, except that it is



possible that the difference may exist. And, granting the *possibility*, it seems to me so much more *probable* that it does so. For there is something so entirely contrary to our ideas in supposing that a man may qualify himself, as it were, by a course of science, for the enjoyments hereafter; or, that he can carry his acquirements, nay even his human wishes and passions, into the next world, that unless it can be proved that he can do so, it seems much more probable that he can *not*: the onus of proof rests with those who maintain that he *can*. They must show that every other hypothesis is even more improbable. Now, when we can show them an animal which in its earthly life passes through two existences, the wants and desires of one of which are totally different from those of the other, it becomes highly probable that, after the resurrection, we may in the same way be endued with entirely different feelings and wishes, without losing our personal identity. And we are, there-

fore, freed from the necessity of admitting that their hypothesis presents fewer difficulties than any other. But I hope, my dears, that, while we have been discussing this abstruse question, you have not been catching cold. You, particularly, Louisa; remember you are liable to cold, and you have nothing but that thin muslin gown on; the sun has now been set some time, and there is rather a chill in the air. I do hope you will not be the worse for it."

"Never fear, papa. I have been so much interested in the conversation, and you know when the mind is occupied, the body seldom suffers."

"The body seems insensible to pain when the mind is much interested, certainly; but I doubt whether it would be saved from taking a cold. On the contrary, the very occupation of your mind would prevent your feeling any premonitory symptoms."

"Indeed, papa, I assure you I have had no premonitory symptoms; and I am

sound as a roach, as I heard John say the other day. Though why a roach should be the emblem of soundness I'm sure I don't know."

"Nor I either," replied her father; "but I do know that it would be better for you to go in. There is no time so dangerous as just after sunset, when the dew is falling. Go in and let us have tea. And then, perhaps, after tea, we may come out again and resume the astronomical lecture which was so unceremoniously interrupted last night by the shower that drove us in. Your friend Susan here was so dreadfully disappointed at its abrupt termination."

"Oh! yes, sir, I was, indeed, I am always so fond of looking at the stars. But I never before had any one who could talk to me about them, and tell me of them. And your lecture, as you call it, was so interesting that I was, indeed, dreadfully disappointed at being forced to go in."

"My lecture, indeed ! It was far more Wentworth's lecture than mine. However, I suppose you called it mine, for fear of making Wentworth blush at you ~~prince~~."

Whether or not Wentworth did blush it was too dark to see. But when Susan stepped into the drawing-room, Louis declared that it must have been cold, for Susan had got quite a colour.

## CHAPTER II.

HOWEVER much Susan, or any of the party, might have looked forward to the resumption of the astronomical lecture, they were for this evening doomed to disappointment. The clouds, which had but served at first to render the sunset more glorious, now collecting in large masses, drifted across the heavens, and completely obscured all view of the stellar kingdom. The party in the house, however, was a happy one, and, resigning themselves to a disappointment which could not be avoided, they contrived to pass a very pleasant

evening, though restricted within the  
of her walk.

When they parted for the night, instead of retiring to rest as the others did, she sat herself down at her writing table taking up a little volume which was upon it, carefully secured with a padlock, she unfastened it with a small key attached to her watch chain. It was in fact, her journal, in which, for many years, she had been in the habit of writing, with more or less regularity, an account of the principal events that occurred to mark her existence, and the impressions and sensations that they excited in her mind. She took up her pen, and having cast an eye over the last written page, she proceeded as follows :—

JUNE 22.—Nearly a month since my last entry, and what a month it has been! how full of the most mingled and extraordinary sensations—hope—fear—happiness—How dare I write the word?—my hand trembles as I do so, and the dread of

as been the cause of the large gap I left in my journal. I could not bring myself to record such a fact as that I—in Vernon—have dared to love ! But no longer doubt that it is so, dreadful the consequences may be,—I am in love. No, else, do my cheeks tingle when his name is mentioned ?—why, else, does my heart send the rebellious blood bounding through every vein at the mere touch of his hand ? Yes, it is too true. I *love*, does *he* love—does he love *me* ? Alas, dreadful question, that I cannot answer in the negative, and dare not answer in the affirmative. Sometimes I have hoped that it might be so. Certainly, no one else has ever spoken to me so kindly, tenderly, as he has done. And yet, that I am !—how can I, ugly, stupid as I am, hope that I have attracted him, when the lovely, angelic Louisa is so constantly in his presence. But then he has known her from a child ; and I have heard him say that those youthful friendships

seldom ripen into the deeper passion. And I am sure she does not love him. Oh, if she did, she could not speak to him, and of him, in that calm, unconcerned way that she does. Her cheeks do not glow when his name is mentioned; her pulse is not quickened by the touch of his hand. She could even talk jokingly and carelessly of his marrying me. But was that a mere random shot, or had it a deeper meaning? Was she trying to find out whether I was, indeed, not indifferent to him? Has anything in my manner betrayed that I consider him as anything more than an acquaintance? And Mr. Castleton, when he accused me—God knows how truly—of being so deeply interested in his conversation about astronomy—had he observed aught to lead him to believe that I took too deep an interest? Can they—do they suspect my weakness? If I thought that they did, I should sink to the very earth with shame; for, after all, what right have I to imagine that he



lowings of his generous heart ; his  
tion but the promptings of his natu-  
ourtesy. No one but myself could  
a of interpreting his manner as im-  
g aught but friendship ; but he must  
that he is making me love him—he  
know that the attention he lavishes  
a poor, friendless girl, must draw her  
towards him ; and he would never—  
t be so cruel as to excite affection  
he could not return, and hopes that  
uld not realise. If it were any other  
he, I should not think so much of it ;  
he is so good, so considerate, so  
ghtful, he would at once see the harm  
ust be doing me, and would abstain  
it. And yet how could he know  
I should so misinterpret his inten-

pair. One thing only I know, that come what will—let him love me or hate me—nothing can prevent me from loving, worshipping, adoring him.

“ But let me retrace my steps a little, and endeavour, partially, to fill up this gap which has found its way into my journal. A few days after the date of my last entry, we were all asked to dine at the Manor House. Louisa had a slight cold, and was unable to go ; so Mr. Castleton and myself were obliged to go without her. Mr. Wentworth dined there too ; and, before dinner, seeing me sitting by myself, not knowing any one to speak to, he came up to me in the kindest manner, and talked to me till dinner was announced ; when, although Miss Gibbs and Miss Hartley were there, either of whom might be considered as very pretty, and one of whom he might have taken in to dinner if he had chosen, it was to *me* that he offered his arm. Oh ! how my heart bounded as I placed my hand within it ! To enjoy the charm of

his conversation for a few minutes, or to hear him talk to other people, was pleasure enough ; but to have him all to myself for the two hours of a formal dinner party, was too great happiness. At first, though, I was dreadfully alarmed, for I saw that his other neighbour at the table was that pretty Miss Gibbs. He soon turned and addressed some observation to her, and my other neighbour took advantage of the opportunity to address himself to me ; and then a new fear took possession of me. I thought this man, a good-natured old gentleman with a great deal to say for himself, would so occupy me that Mr. Wentworth would not again address me, and I knew I should never have courage to address him. But I believe the danger worked its own cure ; for I was so pre-occupied, and answered the old gentleman so very little and unsatisfactorily, that he speedily gave me up, and, to my great delight, Mr. Wentworth returned to me, and, except once or twice for a few

minutes, enchanted me with his delightful conversation for the rest of dinner.

" Oh, how delightful it was, and soon it was over. The people seem to swallow their food whole, and I am wondered they did not choke ! The servants appeared to be perpetually clearing the dishes ; and I could hardly believe that the wine had been once round the table after dinner, when Mrs. Hartley made that dreadful bow, and we were all marched out of the room. And it was over ! two hours I had been so looking forward to were passed and gone, and I might not have such an opportunity of enjoying conversation all to myself again.

satisfaction I may have, at any rate ; did not desert me for Miss Gibbs. When I got back to Shelbridge, Louisa asked me if I had had a pleasant dinner, and I replied very, and added, that I had sat by Mr. Wentworth. Oh, what a pity ! she ; you would rather have sate by a new friend, would you not ? Mr. W

worth you can see every day here. I replied, as calmly as I could, That I knew no one there, and I was very much obliged to Mr. Wentworth for taking care of me ; on which she said, Oh, he is always so considerate ! That saying of hers has been a dreadful thorn in my side ever since. Was it then only out of kindness and consideration that he took me in to dinner ; and was it only because he thought the old gentleman would bore me, that he talked to me so exclusively, to the neglect of Miss Gibbs. How often have I asked myself those questions, and how unable have I always been to give myself satisfactory answers. Like all the difficulties with which my present position abounds, it has one solution that I *will* not, another that I *cannot* admit.

“ A few days after this, we were all walking together, when Mr. Wentworth joined us ; and as the path was too narrow for four to walk abreast, and Louisa had her father's arm, it became necessary for him

to walk by my side. At first he was silent, and I was inclined to think that he was, perhaps, regretting that it was not Louisa who was walking by him, when he suddenly appeared to recover himself, and made himself more agreeable even than usual; and when we got into the road, and there was room for us all to walk abreast, he did not leave me to go to Louisa, though I placed myself by Mr. Castleton on purpose that he might do so, but continued to walk by me and talk a great deal to me, though, of course, then the conversation became more general. Was this mere kindness and consideration, and did it arise from a fear lest I should consider myself slighted? If it did, and if he would really rather have flown to Louisa's side, it indicates such disinterestedness, such noble unselfishness and generosity, that I should love him all the more, so that I am fairly on the horns of a dilemma. If his attentions to me proceed from his love for me—*love for me*, oh!

and delightful even to write the words—  
to love him deeply in return for *his* love !  
They proceed from kindness merely, and  
consideration, I love him still more from the  
light it gives me into his high and noble  
soul. Oh ! if I were but assured that  
I loved me, how deep would be my hap-  
piness ! How all the sorrows of my past  
would sink into nothing in compari-  
son with the inexpressible bliss of feeling  
that I am the chosen object of the love of  
a noble being !

The events of the last few days have  
been so striking. I have had no op-  
portunities of a *tête-à-tête* with him ; and  
they have been delightfully spent—for  
I have seen him constantly. There is,  
however, sometimes, something in his  
manner which gives me uneasiness, and  
excites me fear that, after all, his attention  
to me is merely the result of kindness ;  
that he really loves Louisa ! I have some-  
times seen him look at her, as he has  
never looked at me. But it is so evident

... the more I love her, the  
... very much in t  
... great is my Lo  
... her, that I cou  
... wish for her happi-  
... my own. What  
... she is So lovely  
... me! What a  
... become under  
... she has made me respect  
... some confidence in my  
... been for her, I  
... thought it possible that  
... favourable no-  
... of Mr. Went-  
... started up the  
... within me, that  
... contemplate it as  
... foolish I am  
... were I more  
... than I am, could  
... my hideous ugliness?  
... I shall ever be;  
... that the change in



my own opinion of myself, does not necessarily imply any change in that of others, and I must not be led astray by too partial, too friendly judges.

“ But I really must not write any more to-night, or I shall look even worse than usual in the morning, for I am sure that in my case, ‘ beauty sleep ’ cannot be dispensed with.”

Poor Susan ! poor self-deceived, self-tortured Susan ! How busily hast thou been weaving the web of thine own destruction ! How weakly hast thou interpreted every act of consideration, every gesture of kindness as a proof of love. How wilfully hast thou refused to see the thousand proofs of his devotion to another, while thou hast magnified a thousandfold every trifling proof of regard shown to thyself. And yet thou hast not been without warning ! Thine own pages testify to it ; they prove that the light would force itself into thine eyes, however firmly they were closed against it. Thou couldst not refuse to see that there

was some danger of his becoming attached to thy friend. Poor, blind girl! could not thy woman's penetration detect what her father's eye had long since discovered? or was it that thou refusedst to believe that which would have caused thee to feel so much pain? Better, far better for thee, hadst thou resolutely faced the danger at first, than thus have gone on trying to think that the danger existed not, until, at length, thou almost persuadedst thyself of the fallacy—like the ostrich, which, hiding its head in the sand, thinks it escapes the view of its pursuers—so, because thou wilt not see that Wentworth loves Louisa, thou flatterest thyself that the love itself does not exist. On one point thou art right. Louisa does not yet love Wentworth. There is yet that one barrier between thee and the destruction of all thy hopes. What if thou art called upon thyself to demolish it?

The following morning, when the part

assembled at breakfast, Mr. Castleton said to his daughter,

“Here is a letter, dear, from your aunt Barbara, the contents of which very much concern you.”

“Do they indeed, papa? Well, if there are no secrets, perhaps you will read it out, while I make tea.”

“By all means; here it is.”

MY DEAR FERDINAND,

It is a long time since I have heard any thing of you or my dear niece; but I assure you I have not forgotten you. Indeed, I dare say, if the truth was known, I think more about you, occupied as I am in the gay world, than you do about me, in your secluded country parsonage! For instance, I have not forgotten that last Monday was dear Louisa's birth-day, and that she has now actually completed her seventeenth year. I suppose, now she is old enough to come out, you will not lead quite such a retired life as you have been

doing of late years. In fact, I heard that she found it so dull, poor girl, that she had been obliged to get one of the Vernons to go and amuse her; at which Mrs. Vernon told me the other night she said she had been positively obliged in charity to leave one daughter with you, your poor little girl was getting so unwell. I do not know anything of the daughter who is staying with you, the mother is vastly agreeable, and daughter who is in town is decidedly pretty. But the object of my writing more especially this:—You know Abbotsham is this year a steward of W—— Musical Festival. He does however, mean to appear on the occasion, as he is gone abroad for the sake of Lady A.'s health—the German bath short. In fact, we can guess what he wants; however, no matter why, but the fact is he is gone, and will not be in England at the time of the Festival. Papa, however, does not like that

Festival should suffer from his absence, and he is accordingly going to have a large party at Stapleford Castle, and I am to go down there to act mistress of the house for the occasion. I am to have *carte blanche* for my invitations, and I mean to have a splendid party. Now what I want you to do, is to let my pretty little niece come and stay at the Castle under my *chaperonage*, and so make her *début* in society, as it is fitting she should, at her grandfather's house. I say nothing about you, as I know you will not come ; you will say you cannot leave your parish, and besides, I know you hate society ; but that is no reason why your daughter should be altogether excluded from it. Recollect you were young once. I remember the time when no one enjoyed it more than Ferdinand Castleton, and I, baby that I was, used quite to long for my turn to come. So you must not refuse to allow your daughter pleasures which you once so well appreciated ; and besides

the pleasures of the party, there will be beautiful music at the Cathedral, and I know Louisa is very fond of music; and so am I for that matter, though I confess that sacred music is not exactly the kind suited to my taste, and I had rather go to the opera once than to Exeter Hall ten times. However, I dare say, Louisa, with all her clerical education, will appreciate the sacred music more than I do, and besides, there will be more secular music in the evenings. At any rate, I hope you will let her come; for I am sure, somehow or other, we shall make her enjoy herself. Adieu, dear Ferdinand, this is quite a long letter for me. Give my best love to Louisa, and believe me,

Yours most affectionately,

BARBARA PLEYDELL.

“ Well, Louisa ? ”

“ Oh, papa, it is much too important a matter to be settled in such a hurry. At any rate, it is very kind of Aunt Bar-

bara to have thought of me, when she might have filled the house with such much gayer and more attractive people."

"It certainly is very kind of her to have thought of you ; but you know that does not compel you to accept the invitation, if you do not like it. But do you think you shall like it ?"

"Well, papa, I don't know. I am sure I shall be dreadfully frightened at being all alone at the Castle, with a large party of Aunt Barbara's gay friends. But could not you come too, papa ?"

"No, my dear, certainly not. You see even your aunt says that she is aware that I cannot come, and I should have thought that you ought to have known the nature of my engagements better than to have asked the question."

"Yes, I certainly should ; and I beg your pardon for asking it so thoughtlessly. But then, as you cannot go, I think I would rather not go. I should not like to be there without you, and I should not like

to think that you were left alone here without me. I would certainly rather not go."

"But think of the music, Louisa dear," said Susan. "You have never heard an oratorio, you say; and fond as you are of music, I am sure you would be delighted. Think of hearing the Messiah or the Creation quite through from beginning to end, and sung by the best English vocalists in the country."

"It would be very nice, certainly," replied Louisa, wavering; "but, still, I don't like to leave papa."

"And I am not quite sure whether papa will let you go," said Mr. Castleton, smiling; "however, we will not settle it at present, but we will each think it over; you, whether you would like to go, and I, whether I think it advisable that you should. Of course, if the result of either of our meditations is negative, the plan must be given up. If both are in the affirmative, it may go on."



“ Well, papa, however I may decide, I can assure you that if you think I had better not go, I shall most willingly abide by your decision ; for I am so doubtful as to whether I should like it, that it cannot cost me very much to give it up.”

Much, very much, did the proposal made by Lady Barbara occupy Ferdinand's mind for the remainder of the day. He was naturally anxious to give in to every plan which might give an additional pleasure to his child ; he equally naturally felt some regret at the idea of that enjoyment being shared apart from him. It appeared as if it were the beginning of the separation which, his heart told him, must sooner or later take place between them ; but this was too selfish a consideration to find a more than momentary place in Ferdinand's breast. But a far more important one was this, the making her *débüt* in society, under Lady Barbara's auspices. He was not at all sure that he wished her to make her *débüt* at all, or ever to see more

secretly than she would meet with at her father's house, or in occasional visits among the neighbours. But this would be almost an introduction to the London world: for he knew that the party at Stapleford Castle would be principally, if not entirely, composed of Lady Barbara's London friends: and it was a matter of grave import whether his Louisa, whom he intended to live the life of a clergyman's wife or daughter for the rest of her days, should be permitted by a transient glimpse at the gay life to which he had in his youth been accustomed; and even if he had been inclined to permit her to taste an occasional drop of the cup of pleasure, there was hardly any one whom he should not have preferred to his sister as a companion. He was to a great extent, fond of his sister. He had petted her, and spoilt her as a child, and though, of late years, there had been but little intercourse between them, he had always taken a lively interest in her welfare; but still he was not

ind to her faults ; and he knew that her lessons to the young *débütante* would be of the most worldly description, while her agreeable manners and her real good-nature would render those lessons more dangerous than they might have been if they had come from the lips of some less attractive person. He should have much less fear at entrusting his daughter to Mrs. Vernon, for example. There he would have felt sure that the evil would have worked its own cure, and that Mrs. Vernon's example would have been sufficient antidote to the poison of her precepts.

With Lady Barbara, however, it was different. She possessed many of the qualities most fitted to attract a young person ; particularly one like Louisa, to whom the ties of relationship would make her particularly kind. Moreover, Ferdinand was aware that Louisa's surpassing beauty would expose her to temptations of no ordinary description, from which Lady

Barbara's advice could afford no sort of protection ; and he therefore sincerely regretted that the proposal had been made.

He determined, in fact, that unless Louisa should prove very much bent on accepting the invitation, the tempting offer should be declined.

Louisa, on her part, the more she contemplated the project, the more she shrank from undertaking such a campaign without her father's protection ; and though she gave one sigh of regret for the music, she soon made up her mind that to go alone, to join the party at Stapleford Castle, would be much more a pain than a pleasure. When she and her father, therefore, compared notes on the subject, they found that they had both arrived, by different roads, at the same conclusion ; and Ferdinand, therefore, wrote to his sister, to tell her that Louisa shrank from the idea of appearing alone and unprotected among so large a party as would probably be assembled at Stapleford Castle

on the occasion of the festival ; and that as Lady Barbara would be the mistress of the house, they feared that she would be too much occupied to afford her all the comfort and protection that she would require.

## CHAPTER III.

THE important letter once despatched, both father and daughter felt more at ease, and it was with light and happy hearts that they started, when the heat had a little moderated, for a walk down to the village.

“ We have not seen widow Wilson for a long time,” said Mr. Castleton ; “

neatness and tidiness. I wonder if her pretty grand-daughter has come back to her. She left her to go into service, did she not ?”

“ Yes, I believe she did. She thought that she was old enough not to burden her old grandmother any longer—not that the old lady thought it a burden, I am sure. And I am not at all clear, that it would not have been better for all parties if Mary had stayed here with her grandmother.”

“ How pretty she was—was she not ?”

“ Yes, indeed she was, and a good girl too—a little flighty perhaps, but, on the whole, very well behaved. I only hope that, since she has left her home, she has been equally discreet.”

“ But have you any reason to suppose the contrary ?”

“ None, whatever, except that they have not heard from her for a long time ; but, after all, with the poor people it is a matter of such difficulty to compose a letter, that they are sometimes what we should consider very negligent in writing.”

“ But where is she in service ? ”

“ In London somewhere ; I forget the exact place. She is a kind of general servant in a house where they let lodgings. The house itself is respectable enough—took pains to ascertain that, for her before she went ; but in a great city like London there are so many temptations for a young and inexperienced girl, especially if she is endowed with a considerable share of beauty.”

As he spoke they turned off from the direct road that led to the village, and entered a narrow green lane that opened into it. It was one of those beautiful lanes common in our beautiful England. The hedges were thick with the blossoms of the thorn, and the banks studded with every variety of wild flowers ; the trees growing in the hedgerows, and almost arching overhead, threw a delicious and most refreshing shade ; a small stream trickled under one of the banks, on the edges of which might be seen many



bunch of the lovely little forget-me-not ; while the road itself, little trodden except in harvest-time, was covered with a carpet of the richest turf, intermingled with the gay blossoms of many a daisy and buttercup. Along this rustic track they proceeded, their ears soothed by the rippling of the brook, and enlivened by the rich song of the birds, until they reached a stile, whence a footpath led them, in a few steps, to the widow Wilson's cottage.

At the first glimpse of it, they were both struck with the aspect that it presented, as being different to its ordinary one. Instead of the extreme neatness and tidiness which Louisa had been mentioning, there was an air of neglect and disorder about the whole place, so much so, that Mr. Castleton exclaimed—

“Dear, dear, I fear the old woman must be ill ; and yet, if she had been, she or her neighbours would surely have sent to let us know of it, that we might afford her advice or medicine.”

high-backed chair, her head thrown  
her face covered with her handkerchief  
and groaning and crying most piteously.

She was, apparently, so overwhelmed  
with her own reflections, that she did not  
hear the approach of her visitors, but  
continued to sob and groan without heeding  
their arrival.

An open letter lying in her lap seemed  
to offer some clue to the mystery.

"Why, my good woman," said  
Castleton, taking her hand kindly, "what  
is the meaning of all this?—what has  
happened to reduce you to this state of  
distress?"

The old woman took her handkerchief  
from her face, gazed on Mr. Castleton  
a moment, and then gave way to a  
rebellion of emotion.

"Poor woman," said Mr. Castleton,  
"I feel most deeply for your grief, and

ever may be its cause. But will you not tell me what it is, that I may, if possible, do something to alleviate it? May I read the letter?"

The old woman mechanically placed it in his hand, and then again threw her handkerchief over her face, as if she could not bear to watch him reading that which had caused her so much anguish. The letter was as follows :—

MY DEAREST GRANDMOTHER,

I cannot bear to think that you are suffering from anxiety from not knowing what has become of me ; and, therefore, although perhaps the truth may be even worse than the uncertainty, I write to tell you that, although I have left my place, I am very well off and very comfortable. I fear, dear grandmother, that you will hate me for leaving my place and eating the bread of idleness, and what I am sure you will think wickedness. But, indeed, it

very wrong, I cannot bring myself to  
that I had acted otherwise than I  
done. The gentleman who has  
charge of me is very kind to me, and  
he loves me very much ; and he  
promised me that if I am likely to be  
a mother, he will make me an  
woman again. Indeed, I would not  
come to live with him only for the sake  
having plenty of money. But he is  
handsome, and so generous, and so  
and kind to me, that I could not  
him when he told me that he could  
be happy without me. Still, dear  
mother, I cannot feel quite happy without  
think of you, and kind Mr. Cast

long time not to do wrong ; and it was only when he said he should be so unhappy if I did not give way, that I consented. Do not tell Mr. Castleton and Miss Louisa, if you can help it. But I am sure you will tell them, for I know you will be unhappy, and nobody can comfort you like Mr. Castleton. Indeed, when I think how unhappy I am making you, and how sorry Mr. Castleton will be, I feel quite unhappy myself. But when I think of *him*, I only feel that it is a pleasure to sacrifice everything to him. I am afraid it is very wrong, but, indeed, I cannot help it. I feel as if all my own wishes and feelings were swallowed up in the one longing desire to please him and make him love me. I know you will not write to me, dear grandmother, so I shall not tell you where I am living now. But, indeed, I am very comfortable, and *he* is very good and kind to me. Will you still think sometimes, with fondness, of the little child

you once loved so much, and forgive me for having brought a sorrow on your old age.

I am always your affectionate,  
though erring grandchild,  
MARY BROWN.

When Mr. Castleton had finished reading the letter, his countenance assumed an aspect at once so stern and so sad, that his daughter was quite alarmed, and said —

“Dearest papa, what is it?”

“It is this, my child: that Mary has not only strayed from the path of virtue, and committed a grievous crime, but she is so little conscious of her error, so little repentant for it, that she writes a long letter to her grandmother, apologizing for it, as if she had done no more than play the truant from school, and seems to think that the temptation she was subject to was quite sufficient excuse. Nay, in one place, she almost glories in her shame. And

**t**his is the result of our careful instruction —this the fruit of her poor mother's precept and example. Poor, poor woman! **n**owonder she is stricken down with grief. **B**ut yet she is not to be pitied so much as **t**he unfortunate creature who has caused **h**er misery. "My poor friend," continued **h**e, addressing Mrs. Wilson, "this is indeed a sad blow, but we must bow with submission to the will of God. But tell **m**e, is this the first intimation you have had of your grand-daughter's ruin?"

"I had not heard from her, sir, for so long, that I wrote the other day to her mistress that was, begging her to give me some tidings of her. I suppose she knew where the girl was, or happened to meet with her, for she only wrote to tell me that Mary was well, and would soon write to me herself. I have been eagerly looking forward to the receipt of this letter, and when I saw her handwriting this morning, my heart jumped for joy; and now, oh! oh! oh!" groaned the poor

creature, bursting forth into a fresh flood of tears.

“ You have, then, no clue to the name of the man who has worked your granddaughter’s ruin ? ”

At these words, the old woman sprang from her chair, stood upright before Mr. Castleton, and clenching her withered hand, said in a voice choked with passion,

“ His name ! *his* name ! oh ! if I knew but his name, I would travel, old and feeble as I am, I would travel over the wide world till I met him ; and then I would see if even a weak woman like me could not punish him. May God’s heaviest curse— ”

“ Hush ! hush ! my dear friend. It is not for us to call down the curses of God on any of his sinful creatures. Wicked, indeed, must that man be who can have so led her astray from the paths of innocence ; but depend upon it, his sin will find him out, and if not in this world, he will assuredly be punished for it in the



next. But calm yourself; think not of anger; think rather of the means to be employed to win back to the fold this sheep, which has so unfortunately strayed. You have no notion of her present abode?"

"And if I had, sir, I would not demean myself to write to her—her who has deserted me—deserted all that she ought to hold dear, to follow a profligate ruffian."

"Your anger is, I grant it, excusable, but should not be carried too far. You surely would wish, if possible, that your grand-daughter should be induced to leave the course of sin on which she has entered. Think, if her mother had lived, what would her feelings have been; would she, think you, have been so inexorable? Would she have thought only of punishment, and not at all of repentance?"

At the mention of her deceased daughter, the old woman again softened; her anger passing away, her grief returned, and she again flung herself into her chair, sobbing as before.

"I fear we can do no good at present," said Mr. Castleton to his sister. "We will go home, and I will nurse down to her. She will, perhaps, be better able to manage her than I, and she is a discreet person too; and I caution her, will not spread the tale of poor Mary's fall all over the village."

So saying, he again pressed the old woman's hand, and they left the carriage, neither of them speaking for some time. At last, Mr. Castleton said, "This is a sad story for your innocent and precious child, and I could wish that I had not accompanied me. He will sooner or later, you must have been acquainted with it, so perhaps it is as it is. Poor old lady! It is indeed a hard fate, when the last prop of old age, the being on whom one has expended the last drops from the well of affection, proves ungrateful, and, still worse, or I can hardly be surprised at her passionate anger against the author of all the

chief and misery. Had it not been for my character as a Christian minister, I could myself have well-nigh found it in my heart to join her in her execrations against the man who, for the gratification of a lawless passion—probably as momentary as criminal—could work such an amount of sin and sorrow.”

“He must, indeed, be very wicked, papa ; but I suppose if he is found out he will be punished.”

“Alas ! my dear, his is an offence which cannot be punished by human laws ; and I fear that, even were the full extent of his crime known, his reputation in the world would scarcely suffer. But we must think of some means of endeavouring to reclaim this wretched girl. I will write to her former mistress, whose address I happen to know, from having made enquiries about her at the time when Mary went to her ; and she may, perhaps, be able to give me some clue to her whereabouts, or to the name of the ‘gentleman’

who 'protects' her. His attentions to her must, in all probability, have been evident before she left her situation."

As they returned to the house, the sunlight was still streaming gorgeously across the valley. The birds still sang; the sweet perfume of the flowers was wafted through the air; but both father and daughter were unconscious of these charms, to which, when they started on their walk, they had been so sensitive. Both were sad and pre-occupied. He was thinking of the best means of obtaining the desired information respecting the loss of the sheep of his fold;—she was wondering how men could be so selfish and so wicked as to be the cause of so much grief and desolation.

## CHAPTER IV.

FEW days after these events, the following letter arrived from Lady Barbara :—

DEAR FERDINAND,

I was very sorry to find, by your letter, that you did not intend to comply with my request, that you would let little Louisa come and spend a few days with me at Stapleford Castle, when I leave my party there for the W—— musical festival. Your reasons against doing so are very plausible, and, I confess, staggered me a little at first ; as, of course, I shall be too much occupied with attending

to the company in general, to be able to pay as much attention as I could wish to your dear girl in particular ; but I have now thought of a mode by which I think all objections can be obviated. I know you have a high opinion of that Miss Vernon who is staying with you. Why should not she accompany Louisa ? and, while both are nominally under my *chaperonage*, why should not she act as bear-leader (to use a horrid, vulgar expression) to our young *débutante* ? She is much older, and has had some experience in the world, and could be constantly with Louisa, and consequently much more useful than any regular *chaperon*, however devoted. I have spoken to Mrs. Vernon, and she is quite willing to let her daughter come ; in fact, *entre nous*, I think she is only too glad to keep her away from home. So do you but say the word that you will let Louisa come, and the whole affair is arranged as nicely as possible. Let me have an answer as soon as prac-

licable, as by it my other invitations must be, to a certain extent, regulated.

Ever yours,

BARBARA PLEYDELL.

By the same post, Susan received the following from her mother :—

MY DEAR SUSAN,

I met Lady Barbara Pleydell last night, at the Duchess of B——'s ; when she asked my permission to invite you to spend a few days at Stapleford Castle, with your young friend Miss Castleton, who is asked to go there for the W—— musical festival. I need not, I trust, enjoin you to accept this invitation. It is not often that you will have such an opportunity ; and if people do go out of their way to be civil to you, you cannot but accept their civility. I assure you I shall be seriously displeased if any of that shyness, or false pride, which you are so fond of assuming, deters you from going, because you will not always have me at your elbow. You have chosen to give up coming to town ;

and ought not, therefore, to miss any opportunity of seeing people in the country: not that I think you will get any good by it. You are one of those people who never seem to get any good by anything; still, I do not think it right that you should miss any chance. You will be glad to hear that Isabella has been enjoying herself very much. We have had a very gay season; and I am not without hope that in *her* case something may come of it. I wish to goodness Lady Barbara had asked *her*, instead of *you*: however, as she has taken it into her head to choose you, mind you don't throw away the chance. Pray remember me to Mr. and Mrs. Castleton, and believe me to be

Your affectionate mother,

C. S. VERNON.

P. S. I hear you are to have the very best singers at the festival. The stewards have determined this year to eclipse their predecessors.

The receipt of these letters threw the



whole party at the rectory into a state of doubt and indecision. Susan, it is true, was very decided in her wishes. She was passionately fond of music; and the promise held out in the postscript of her mother's letter, that they were to have the best singers, and that the whole thing was to be got up with more than usual care and attention, gave her a very earnest wish to be at the festival. To this was coupled the desire of prolonging her stay at the rectory, which would be an almost necessary consequence of her acceptance of the invitation, as she would of course go with Louisa; and the day fixed for the assembling of the party was some time later than that originally arranged for her departure, and she would thus gain a few additional days for enjoying the society of Wentworth. Her visit at the castle, too, would prolong her absence from home; and as her life there was never a happy one, this was in itself no inconsiderable inducement; she therefore wished most

hersen, now that her dread of  
alone was removed, was very des  
go, though she still somewhat r  
the leaving her father at home by  
The wishes of the two young ladies  
so decided, Mr. Castleton had  
heart to refuse them ; and altho  
mind misgave him that mischief  
follow, he gave the desired per  
being in a great measure actuated  
fear, lest his own selfish desire t  
his daughter with him should  
undue bias to his decision.

To Wentworth, however, the ti  
the acceptance of the invitation  
unmixed dismay. He had heard  
first invitation and its rejection,  
consequently considered himself a

loved him, and he felt, therefore, that there was no safeguard against her being smitten with the charms of some of the fashionable London men, whom he had no doubt would be assembled at Stapleford Castle. He knew enough of Lady Barbara's character to be quite sure that, if an eligible *parti* presented himself, she would do every thing in her power to bring about a match. In fact, he thought it highly probable that this might be one of the principal objects that Lady Barbara had in view in pressing the invitation ; what, then, could he do ? At one time he thought of asking Mr. Castleton to obtain an invitation for him also to the castle ; but he soon saw that that was, in the first place, too much to ask ; in the second, that it would probably be refused ; in the third, that it would be very unkind to leave Mr. Castleton alone, just as he was deprived of his daughter ; and in the fourth, that, if he did so, he would probably appear to so little advantage among the young men of fashion,

whom his fancy conjured up, that his presence would be worse than useless, and that he should defeat instead of furthering his wishes.

This course of proceeding being then so evidently objectionable, the bold idea occurred to him of making a formal declaration previous to her departure, and thus binding her by an engagement. But this again he scouted as dishonourable, and taking an unfair advantage of his position under any circumstances ; but doubly so in consequence of the possibility that existed of her becoming a great heiress. Still, he thought, without binding *her*, if she knew of *my* attachment, it might have a certain influence upon her ; and she might be the less likely to surrender her heart to the expressions of attachment of others, if she were aware that she had already kindled a flame in the heart of one whom she had so long known and valued. Even this course, however, he knew he ought not to take without first consulting her father,

and he accordingly determined in the first instance, before he decided on any ulterior proceeding, to make a confidant of Mr. Castleton ; and, supposing that he found him well-disposed to favour his suit, to take his advice as to the best course to be pursued under his present somewhat embarrassing circumstances.

Louisa was so constantly with her father, and he himself was so much engaged in his parochial duties, that it was not very easy to find an opportunity for speaking privately to Mr. Castleton, without asking formally for an interview, which he dreaded. He determined, however, that he would open the subject on the first occasion of his dining at the rectory, while he and his rector were sitting over their wine after the ladies had retired.

The desired opportunity was not long before it presented itself. During the meal, Wentworth was hardly so agreeable as usual. He was absent, pre-occupied, so much so, as to provoke more than one

good-humoured jest from his fair companions, whose withdrawal he both wished and dreaded. When, at length, he found himself *tête-à-tête* with his host, he felt it almost impossible to begin. A large strawberry stuck in his throat ; he swallowed his wine the wrong way ; when, just as he had screwed his courage to the sticking point, Mr. Castleton began to ask him about a poor woman whom he had been visiting, and he seemed as far from beginning as ever. Their *séance* was seldom long protracted, as they both liked to join the ladies, who were walking in the garden, as soon as possible. And Mr. Castleton—seeing that Wentworth had ceased drinking, had actually said,—

“No more wine, Wentworth ? shall we join the ladies ?”

When, growing desperate at seeing his valued opportunity thus slipping through his fingers unimproved, he made a violent effort, and said,—

“Before we go, Mr. Castleton, there is—

one point on which I wished to speak with you."

Mr. Castleton bowed, and resumed the seat from which he had just risen.

This was worse than ever ; he had got into nearly as formal a train as if he had asked for a private interview. However, he was in for it now ; so making a dash at it at once, he proceeded,—

" I do not know whether it has escaped your observation, that I have for some time regarded Miss Castleton with feelings deeper than those of mere friendship."

As he paused with the hope that Mr. Castleton would give him a little help, that gentleman replied :

" Indeed, my dear Wentworth, if I must candidly confess it, I have sometimes thought that you regarded her with feelings of a warmer nature than mere friendship ; but then, again, I knew that it was very possible I might be mistaken."

" No, no, you were not mistaken ; indeed you were not. I have long loved

Miss Castleton with an intensity that I cannot attempt to express. But I trust I need not say that I have always scrupulously avoided making anything approaching to a declaration, or, indeed, giving her any reason to believe in my attachment, until I had first ascertained your sentiments on the subject."

"And it is with this view that you have now made me this declaration?"

"Undoubtedly; in the first instance, I am anxious to know how far my attachment to Miss Castleton meets with your approbation. With regard to any ulterior proceedings on my part, I had also intended asking your advice."

"Well, my dear fellow, of course I need not say that no one could personally be more agreeable to me for a son-in-law than yourself. I have had many opportunities of observing your conduct, of becoming acquainted with your principles; and, I can truly say that there is no one to whom I could confide the happiness of



my darling child, with a greater sense of security than to yourself."

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Castleton. Whatever may be the result, I shall always reflect with the greatest pleasure on these flattering expressions from one, whom I love and revere as I do yourself."

"You must let me conclude, however," replied Mr. Castleton; "I was going to say, that, however much I may personally like you, I must have some little idea of your means of maintaining a wife, before I can formally sanction your becoming a suitor to Louisa."

"No doubt that is a very reasonable request; but I must confess that I approach this part of the subject with great diffidence. The fact is, my ability to maintain a wife depends on my ability to obtain a living. I have understood from my father that I shall probably have about £8000 at his death; but, that during his life, he cannot afford to allow me more than £200 a-year. If, therefore, I can

obtain a living of about £500 a-year, should be able to maintain a wife in tolerable comfort, though not in affluence but, until that time arrives, it would, of course, be madness for me to think of marrying."

"And your chances of obtaining such a living?"

"Are—first, my father's interest with the government; and, secondly, the promise of my uncle the dean, who has undertaken to give me the first good living that falls vacant."

"I think better of your second chance than your first," observed Ferdinand. "It is true the government livings are numerous, but the applications also are unbounded; and, though your father has always been a steady supporter of the present ministry, I doubt his influence being sufficient to gain a living of anything like the value you mention; for most of the government livings are very small indeed. And one of less value than

£500 would certainly not enable you to support a wife with comfort, even with the aid of the allowance that I could make Louisa. But, seeing that even the best of these chances is but a chance, and you may be long before you attain the desired preferment, what is it that you propose? to what course do you wish me to give my consent? I tell you fairly that I am not disposed to sanction a formal engagement, to which there could appear to be no reasonable prospect of a termination."

"All that I at present ask, sir, is that you will permit me to acknowledge to Miss Castleton the deep attachment with which she has inspired me."

"But if you are not to ask for an answer, to what purpose this declaration? Had you not better let things remain as they are until this desired living turns up? in which case I promise you I will make no objection whatever to your suit."

"I assure you, Mr. Castleton, I thought with you, until I heard that Miss Castle-

THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT.

she was to be Lady Baskin's guest at Baskin Castle at the approaching festival. But now I confess I look with misgiving on her being exposed to the influence of the gay young men who will surround her assembled there; and I thought that if she were aware that there was one faithful heart at home that loved her with the most ardent passion, it might perhaps prevent her being too easily captivated by the expressions of attachment which she will doubtless hear from many others."

"There is certainly some truth in what you say. The first time that a woman hears that she is loved, her heart must be more moved towards the lover than when she has become accustomed to the pleasure of inspiring attachment. But then you must acknowledge, that in asking me to permit this, you are asking me to throw away a chance of my daughter's making a brilliant marriage at once, in order that she may, perhaps, wait many years or

she can make even a poor match with you."

"Oh! Mr. Castleton, now I know you are not in earnest; for I am sure you do not think that happiness depends on wealth or rank."

"No, I certainly do not; and if you had but this living you talk of in actual possession, I would rather she should marry you than an earl or duke, with his hundred thousand a year. What I object to is, the uncertainty—the possibility of her becoming entangled in an engagement, the termination of which we can none of us foresee."

"But I do not intend to ask her to engage herself."

"No, my dear fellow; but you do intend to do all you can to win her affection. And, if her heart is engaged, her hand may as well be engaged also."

"You refuse your consent, then, to my proposed declaration?"

"Nay, nay, dear Wentworth, I do not

"I am to say 'I refuse.' I only say that  
present. I do not quite approve. But  
we see if we could not hit on any o-  
pinion which might preserve you and  
from the risk of her throwing herself  
on the first person that asked her, not  
because he was the first person who  
dared so ; and, at the same time, might  
permit the declaration of your feelings  
time at least."

"I will tell you what I will do, if  
approve. I have no objection to making  
a *confidante* of Miss Vernon, and giving  
her *carte blanche* to make my attachment  
known to Miss Castleton, if circumstances  
should arise to render it desirable."

"But of that desirableness who is to  
judge?"

"Miss Vernon herself."

"But what is to guide her in forming  
her opinion?"

"She shall be guided by the worth  
the suitor, and the reality of his attach-  
ment. Miss Castleton will, proba-

the *confidante* of any love-affair spring up. If Miss Vernon's suitor worthy, his attachment to Miss Castleton's heart really inwards him, she shall say nothing of my unfortunate attachment. If, however, she thinks him unlikely to be happy—if she thinks his attachment feigned or transitory, and, above all, she thinks that Miss Castleton is to favour him, simply because she loves him to be the only person who has conceived an attachment for her, she shall make my love known, and conjure Miss Castleton to pause ere she consigns one, who loves her, to unmitigated wretchedness which shall last !”

“so,” said Mr. Castleton ; “ on this I yield my consent. But I will not make your communication to Miss Vernon till the time approaches for their departure ?”

“Certainly not ; I shall certainly pre-

far being master of my own secret as long as possible. And now I must return you a thousand thanks my dear, kind friend, for your goodness to me in this matter."

"By no means, dear Wentworth. Louise's happiness is my only aim. Give you the means of marrying at once, I would not hesitate to confide her to your care. As it is, I think your proposition by no means unreasonable; and I have sufficient confidence in Miss Vernon's sense and penetration to feel pretty sure that she will not betray her trust, though you certainly will impose upon her a heavy responsibility. But come, I hear tea going in; I fear we have lost our walk for this evening."

As Wentworth left the room, Mr. Castleton stayed a few minutes to reflect on the promise he had just made. He was not, however, disposed to retract what he had said. He would decidedly have liked Wentworth for a son-in-law if his marriage could have taken place immediately; but he



a long, uncertain engagement. For, he thought the plan agreed on was a very fair compromise, and if it were means of saving Louisa from a hasty, imprudent marriage, it would be well worth even if a protracted engagement to the north were the consequence.

There was one point, however, that gave him a little uneasiness. It was whether Susan Vernon were altogether a disinterested party. He had sometimes fancied that she had something approaching to a partiality for Wentworth. He considered, however, that if this were true, Wentworth himself must have found it out, as we are seldom slow in discovering our own partialities. He was fancying that we are objects of attachment to others. So he supposed he must be mistaken. "Besides," thought he, "if she has any attachment herself to the north, she will not be sorry to see him, if otherwise disposed of, and will, therefore, be the less likely to interfere, and will not, therefore, announce Went-

worth's passion unless she sees some undeniably good reason for it; and as for any pain that she might suffer at finding that Wentworth's affections are engaged to another, it is far better that she should feel it now than that she should go on fostering a passion which can never be returned. Yes! it is decidedly good for parties that this plan of Wentworth should be put in execution. I will, therefore, let it proceed as agreed upon."

Having arrived at this conclusion, rejoined the party in the dining-room.

## CHAPTER V.

For the following month little change took place in the aspect of affairs at the Rectory. If anything, an increased degree of happiness was enjoyed by all the party. Louisa felt happy at the prospect of hearing beautiful music, which she loved, and also of passing a gay fortnight at her grandfather's house. Her pleasure, it is true, was damped by the necessity of leaving her father at home. But Louisa, though a good and excellent daughter, was not quite an angel; and she could not avoid being rather excited at the prospect

of being introduced into society, on such favourable circumstances. Her father would only be without her for a short time, and he would not be alone; "dear Mr. Wentworth" would be with him, and had promised to take care of him. Ferdinand himself, too, was cheerful, and did everything in his power to avoid casting a gloom over his daughter's happiness, so that her conscience was pretty well satisfied, and her girlish spirit rose to a high pitch of glee.

Wentworth was happy, inasmuch as he had unburthened his mind to Mr. Castleton, and had succeeded in obtaining qualified sanction to his suit. He said to himself that it was only for a short time; and that, though, doubtless, time would pass slowly, still it would come to an end at last; and in so brief a space he hardly thought it possible that Louisa's heart would be irretrievably lost to him. He, therefore, was happy, in high spirits and more agreeable even than usual.

To Susan every day brought a fresh increase of happiness, for every day she became more and more assured that Wentworth looked upon her with affection, if not with love. His promise to Ferdinand that he would not attempt to engage Susan's affections, and his knowledge that Ferdinand's eye was now upon him, rendered him more and more cautious and ever in his behaviour to her, so that even a less blinded eye than Susan's might have failed to discover any marks of affection in his demeanour to Miss Castleton. The knowledge, moreover, that he was so soon about to confide his secret to Susan, to place so important a trust in her hands, gave to his manner to her, unknown to himself, a greater degree of *embarrassment* than it had ever before assumed. Susan felt that there was a link between them, though she knew it not. He felt that they were to be drawn together by being the depositaries of the same important secret ; and his manner was uncon-

by which, had his own heart been  
might have been led to guess at  
of Susan's. And, moreover, he  
a vain man. He knew that he wa  
means strikingly handsome—or br  
agreeable. And, as society had nev  
the object of his life, he had nev  
accustomed to consider himself  
impressions he might have made  
most important point in his retros  
the past or contemplations of the f  
except, of course, in so far as r  
Louisa and her feelings toward  
Few men accustomed to society,  
thinking constantly of themselves,  
light in which they were consid

that his acts of courtesy and kindness would be misinterpreted, and he, consequently, went on his course, unconscious alike of the present happiness he was bestowing, or the future misery he was preparing for his innocent and unoffending companion. Thus the party at Shelbridge Rectory went on indulging in the happiness of the present, and totally unmindful of the change which a few weeks, perchance a few days, might work in their feelings. The weather had been lovely; the heat had become greater, as the days grew shorter; but the evenings were delicious, and many and many a charming moonlit walk had the party enjoyed in the beautiful pleasure-grounds, in the midst of which the parsonage was situated.

The gaiety of the party, however, was rather damped, as the time of separation approached more nearly; and on the day immediately preceding the departure of the two young ladies, decided a gloom<sup>d</sup> hung

over their spirits. Now that the moment for leaving her father was so close at hand, the feelings of pleasure with which Louis was looking forward to her approaching dissipation were overwhelmed by the regret that she felt at Mr. Castleton being left without her. Susan felt that she was parting from Wentworth, not knowing when they might meet again; while the latter was actuated by similar feelings with regard to his parting from Louisa. There is always something very melancholy in doing any thing for the last time; and the last day previous to the separation of a happy and united family is always a sad one. The reflection, "This is the last luncheon," "the last dinner," "the last evening that we shall spend together," is perpetually intruding itself upon the mind; and however bright may be the future, thoughts like these will always cast a certain degree of sadness over our hearts. On the three young people at Shelbridge, whose future was so uncertain, it was na-



hat such thoughts should have a usual influence; and so prone to think *present* circumstances of great importance, that though each same subjects for congratulation, had made them so happy during the month, the pain of the present moment was the uppermost thought in minds of all. Under these circumstances it was Mr. Castleton who kept up the spirits of the party. His cheerfulness came from too deep a source to be affected by such passing emotions. The pleasure he felt was in the happiness of his wife and especially of his darling child; he had now reassured himself into the belief that no harm would befall her, and he felt sure she would experience pleasure from her approaching visit, and would not permit the pain of the separation to throw any gloom on his spirits. His wife, too, was the life of the party, and succeeded wonderfully in restoring their flagging spirits to their usual gaiety. The

day had been intensely hot, in so much that none of the party had left the house, proposing to themselves to have a delightful stroll after dinner, in the cool of the evening, a pleasure which, their hearts whispered, was to be enjoyed together for the last time.

Wentworth had as yet found no opportunity of making his revelation to Susan. He grew very nervous as the time approached for him to do so ; but as it was absolutely necessary that it should be done, he engaged Mr. Castleton to separate from them with his daughter in the course of their walk, which might easily be managed, under the pretext of saying a few last words to her ; and that then he could take advantage of his *tête-à-tête* with Susan to make his dreaded revelation.

The moment now approached. The ladies had retired, and the gentlemen, after a very brief *séance*, prepared to join them. They then strolled in the direction of the wood, that clothed the sides of the hill on

the Rectory stood, in which there  
any delightful walks, that had been  
rite resort during the late scorching  
. As they walked, Wentworth,  
d being full of the communication  
was about to make, was rather  
; Susan, whose heart was torn by  
ling emotions at visiting thus, per-  
r the last time, spots where she  
en so happy, was also silent, and  
ted not a little on the cause of the  
constraint of Wentworth's de-  
ur. Ferdinand and his daughter,  
r, conversed freely. They looked  
l to nothing worse than a short se-  
n from each other; and, as has  
marked already, Ferdinand's cheer-  
was so equable, that it saved his  
er from feeling the full force of her  
at parting from him. These two,  
ept up the conversation, in which  
ers joined only occasionally. Still  
portunity occurred for Wentworth's  
l *tête-à-tête*. They had already

turned homewards, and he began to doubt how it was to be managed, when, at a point where two paths diverged from each other, Susan, rather desirous perhaps to prolong the walk, asked, "Might not we go and look at the young pheasants? I should like to see them once more before I go."

Mr. Castleton eagerly seized the opportunity to reply :

"I am rather afraid of Louisa's going any further, as it is getting damp, and she is rather delicate, you know ; but I think you are stronger than she is, and if you like to go, I have no doubt Mr. Wentworth will escort you, while I take charge of my little one."

Susan's heart bounded within her. It was rather revolting to her sense of delicacy, to be out alone in the twilight with a young man in a wood. She had never done so before, or any thing approaching to it ; but then she did not know how to object. Mr. Castleton had seemed to think it

quite natural, and it would seem so foolish, after once expressing a wish to see the pheasants, to say she did not care about them. And then, if she did, Louisa would insist on coming too, and would perhaps take cold ; and then, it was most probable that Mr. Castleton was anxious for a little private conversation with his daughter, for which he had had no opportunity in the course of the day, and it would be cruel to deprive him of it. And then, it was only for once ; it could not be drawn into a precedent, as she was to part from Wentworth on the morrow, and knew not how many months or years might elapse ere she met him again. These considerations, aided by the natural ardent wish of thus enjoying his company for a few minutes alone, sufficed to prevent her from making any objection to the proposed plan. And she and Wentworth accordingly turned off to the left, along the path that led to the pheasants, while Fer-

dinand and his daughter walked on to home.

For some moments they proceeded in silence. In ordinary cases of embarrassment, it is usually the lady who is first to speak; but in this instance, Susan's heart was beating so fast, that she would be impossible to utter an articulate sound. It was therefore Wentworth at last broke the silence.

"Miss Vernon, I am very glad of the opportunity of speaking to you alone. I have something very important to say to you before you leave to-morrow—something important, perhaps essential, to the happiness of my whole future life."

If Susan's heart beat thick and fast before, who now could pretend to deny its pulsations? Was he actually going to propose to her? At this moment the impossibilities of his doing so vanished from her thoughts, and she felt sure she was going to receive a proposal in form.

As she did not reply, Wentworth proceeded: "It is a great, a very great favour that I am about to demand of you;—one which I certainly have no right to demand, and which nothing but your kindness and goodness could have induced me to ask."

To this Susan forced herself to reply: "I am sure, Mr. Wentworth, any thing that I can with propriety grant, I shall be only too happy to accord you."

"With regard to impropriety, I assure you I have not been thoughtless; and I may as well state that I have communicated the whole of my intention to Mr. Castleton, by whose approval I am now speaking to you."

"What can he mean?" thought Susan. "Does he want me to engage myself to him, unknown to mamma? I wish he would speak out at once."

As she, however, was still silent, he resumed: "My principal apology must be the peculiar circumstances in which I

in place. Can you not conceive Vernon that when a man has contracted a devoted attachment to a young lady: when he is precluded, from want of his pecuniary means, from asking at once for her hand; when he is hindered about to plunge into the gay world, to become the object of admiration and attention, doubtless to others, and those men far more calculated to win a woman's heart than himself:—when all this is the case, can you not conceive that he will be driven to his wits' end, and in his distress will seize upon the most convenient expedient of extricating himself in some degree from his difficulties? ”

“Certainly,” thought Susan, “that amounts to a declaration; but it is an odd one. What means can he allude to? What can he want me to do?”

Seeing, however, that he depaused for a reply, she contrived to say, “Certainly, Mr. Wentworth, I can conceive that the position you describe is a very trying one.”



ing I love best in the world ; and remain here, she will be surrounded with admirers and flatterers ; and I can only have no means of opposing what that will be laid to her heart, but I do not even know how far it is successful. As far as I am to consider myself as one of the miserable of men. From this it is, Miss Vernon, that I wish to extricate me."

"What can I do, Mr. Wentworth ? For my friend's sake tell me at once what you have to do !" exclaimed Susan, almost wild by the suspense from which she was suffering.

"Wish you, Miss Vernon, to be her angel. She has no friend but

ton may be engaged ; but if you find that she is really loved for her own sake—you think she returns the attachment—I would be kind of you to let me know, and put me at once out of my suspense. If you think that any one is trifling with her affections—is feigning an affection that she does not feel—and that she is in danger of bestowing her love on an unworthy object then tell her, I beseech you, that you know of one who has long loved her with the most ardent passion, and who now confides that passion to you, that you may make use of the knowledge of it in the way that you think most calculated to promote her happiness ; for, indeed, assure you, Miss Vernon, it is not alone selfish motive which prompts me thus to address you. I do not ask you—on the contrary, I charge you—*not* to make known my affection for her, if you find that she is likely to form a worthy attachment to one who sincerely loves her for her own sake. It is only in the event of her being

danger of being entrapped into loving me one, merely because he is the first person who has paid his addresses to her, that I wish you to make use of this my power; and herein lies the weight of the responsibility that I am desirous of imposing upon you. Can you, will you, accept it? "

It was fortunate for Susan that Wentworth had spoken at such length before he stopped for an answer, as it gave her time, to a certain extent, to regain the control of her feelings. His first words had made manifest to her how cruelly she had been deceiving herself; and the revulsion from the extreme of hope and the excitement of expectation to the dead, dull consciousness of despair, was almost too dreadful for her to bear. Her first impulse had been that of indignation at the manner in which she fancied her feelings had been trifled with; but a moment's reflection convinced her that she had only herself to blame. She could not lay to

it was not his fault if she had misinterpreted them; in fact, she told herself that if, an hour ago, she had heard of his attachment to another woman, ever much she might have been surprised, but she could not have felt injured; the equivocal nature of his words, at the beginning of their conversation, which had excited such buoyant hopes in her, was quite unintentional on his part, and he could not, therefore, feel angry with her, but that very circumstance made her indignation the more intense. Indignation would afford an outlet to her feelings, but they must be closely suppressed, and would chafe all the more from this repression. Strong-minded as she was, she

concluded, they arrived at a rustic seat, on which she hastily sank, motioning him to take his place by her side.

It was a beautiful spot that they had thus accidentally pitched upon. The path here crossed, by a rustic bridge, the little stream that fell in cataracts down the side of the hill, and hurried on to join the river in the valley below. The seat was so placed as to command a view of one of the most picturesque of these cataracts, on which the moon, which had now risen, was shining beautifully. The water gleamed in the moonlight as it sprang from the rocky ledge, and then leapt down with lightning rapidity into the dark pool below. "Thus," thought Susan, "it is with me. For one fleeting instant my heart was cheered with the uncertain light of hope, and now it is hopelessly plunged into the deep dark pool of despair. Oh! my God! truly may I say with the prophet king, the waters have gone over my soul." Thankful, however, she felt that

the position of the seat was such, that the moonlight, falling from behind, cast her face into deep shadow, so that the traces of suffering, which she could hardly doubt were visible upon her countenance, were concealed from the view of her companion. She was, however, surprised at her own self-possession. She could not have believed it possible that, under the influence of such a blow, she could have possessed so much composure. But so it constantly is with great, with sudden afflictions ; the effect of the blow is so stunning, that at first we are hardly conscious of the full extent of our misfortune. It was, therefore, with a voice in which even a less agitated ear than Wentworth's would have failed to detect any emotion, that she replied :—

“ There is no amount of responsibility, Mr. Wentworth, that I would shrink from, if by any means I could conduce to dear Louisa's present or future happiness. I will, therefore, undertake the part you as-

sign me ; it being, however, distinctly understood, that I am not to play the part of a spy on her movements ; and that it is only in the event of her being on the point of bestowing her affections on an unworthy object, that I am to make known to her the declaration that you have just made to me."

It was in bitterness of spirit that Susan uttered these last words. He had made her a declaration—but of what a different character from the one that she had expected ! She seemed to take a delight, however, in using the words, though he attached no meaning to them but the obvious one.

"I shall be quite satisfied," he replied ; "that is all I ask ; except that, perhaps, if you see that her heart is really won, it would be kind of you to tell me of it, and so put me out of my suspense."

"Would not any suspense be better than knowing the worst ?" said she. " Ah ! Mr. Wentworth, can you profess to love

Louisa, and yet do you think that you should be happier in knowing that her affections were bestowed on another, than in enduring any amount of suspense?"

"Not so, not so," replied he; "but if you give me this promise I shall feel pretty sure that, unless I hear from you, nothing very dreadful is going on."

"I would willingly promise, if it were not that I dread my office of guardian-angel degenerating into that of spy; but to avoid that danger, I must decline to give that promise: but, remember we are only going for a short time, and then you may resume your functions of guardian yourself. And now I think we had better be returning. We shall not have time to see the pheasants, and they will wonder what has become of us."

"Thank you, thank you, a thousand times, dear Miss Vernon! I can never be sufficiently grateful to you; and I will never forget your kindness as long as I live. And I place the most entire confi-



in your exercising your trust ad-  
ly, and well supporting your heavy  
sibility."

y walked home in silence : Went-  
thinking of Louisa, and revolving  
mind all the circumstances in which  
as likely to be placed, and the at-  
s of which she was likely to be  
ject ; while Susan was busy with  
vn sad thoughts. Every step of  
y home had a painful association  
r. A few short minutes previously  
d trodden that path, but with what  
at feelings ! Then she was momen-  
expecting a declaration which was to  
her happiness for life ; now she had  
ard it, and it had dashed the cup  
s for ever from her lips. As  
d crossed the shadow of that noble  
hich the moonlight flung across the  
he had been filled with hope and  
expectation. That shadow had  
y moved ; and as she recrossed it,  
w nothing before her but the dark-  
f despair.

They soon regained the house, and found that Louisa had already made tea.

"Well, did you see the pheasants?" she enquired, as the others entered.

"No; we did not see them after all," replied Susan. "I felt rather tired, and we sat down for a little while on the seat by the bridge, and then came home."

"Indeed, you look tired, Susan dear," said Louisa. "You are as white as a sheet, and your hand is as hot as fire. I am afraid you are rather feverish. I hope you have not caught any cold?"

"No, thank you; I think not. I do not feel as if I had caught cold; but I am a little tired, certainly, and my head aches. You know it has been very hot all day, and I have been very busy packing; so I think after tea you shall excuse me, and I will go to bed early, that I may be in good looks to-morrow, you know," she added, bitterly.

"Yes, dear; you shall go certainly, directly; and I dare say I shall not be very

fter you, for I, too, am rather tired.  
re is a cup of tea ; I dare say it will  
you a little.”

She took the proffered cup, which  
seemed, acceptable to her fevered lips  
ached throat, but refused the bread  
water, feeling, that if her life had de-  
pend on it, she could not have swallowed  
it at that moment.

Mr. Worth soon took his departure,  
promising to come up and see them off in  
the morning ; for though they had not far  
to go, they were to start directly after  
breakfast, that they might have time to  
prepare themselves at home in the castle,  
lest the arrival of Lady Barbara's other  
husband should deprive them of her services  
in the morning.

## CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Susan rose to retire, she thought that now, at least, she should enjoy the luxury of being alone, and of being left to her hard fate without interruption. But she was not destined to escape so long a solitude. Louisa had had her own suspicions of the nature of the private walk which her friend had taken with Wentworth.

said half-tenderly, half-jestingly,  
"Susan dear, tell me all about it.  
Wentworth to be a happy man,  
miserable wretch for the rest of his

"Indeed, dear Louisa, I hope sincerely  
you be happy ; but I assure you it  
does not depend on me to make him so."

"Oh, really ? but tell me truly, did not  
he take advantage of his opportunity to  
make any declaration ?"

"He was half-tempted to say that he  
indeed, made a declaration ; she re-  
fused, however, and, answering the spirit  
rather than the letter of the question, she  
said—

"Oh, indeed, he did not !—why should  
I ? What could have put such an idea  
into your head ?"

"Why, what principally put it into my  
head was the very unusual proceeding of  
making a walk with him alone in that  
place and the abrupt manner in which  
he proposed the plan ; and when I ques-

tioned him about it, he answered me evasively, that I felt convinced that there was something more than met the eye, that papa knew of some resolution which Mr. Wentworth wished to confide to my ear, and your ear alone. But you were really was mistaken?"

"I tell you, Louisa, that Mr. Wentworth has neither at this time nor at any other made anything approaching a proposal to me, and that I have no least expectation that he ever will do so. In fact, nothing would cause me great astonishment."

"Oh! that's only your modesty. Let me assure you, dear, you are much, so much more attractive than you think yourself."

"Than I think myself! That, indeed, might easily be! However, on this point I fear I am too good a judge; and I have never been met with nothing yet, always except your and your father's affectionate friendship, to alter the low opinion that I have

guilty to entertaining of myself. But, surely, the simple fact of my being alone with Mr. Wentworth would not have induced you to think he was meditating a proposal. Something else must have put it into your head ; and yet I am sure you can never have seen anything in Mr. Wentworth's manner to lead you for a moment to suppose that he had any such intention."

"Well, perhaps not exactly. Still I have always thought that Mr. Wentworth seemed fond of your society, and he has sometimes seemed to consider you as more than an ordinary acquaintance ; so that I have sometimes pleased myself with fancying that he might be, or become, attached to you, and that so my two best friends might be permanently united. But, however, it appears I am mistaken, and I can only say I am very sorry for it."

"But you seem to forget, dear, that there are two parties to the contract, and you do not appear to have thought of my

## FERDINAND CASTLETON.

side of the question; or whether, if Mr. Wentworth were ever so willing, I should be ready to say 'Yes,' as soon as he chose to ask me?"

"To say the truth, my dear Susan, I could see plainly enough that you not *dislike* Mr. Wentworth. In fact one could dislike him—so noble, so and so good as he is; and I can think that you were so uncomfortable at home, that when you found your object of attachment to a good, & man, whom you must respect, as I saw you liked,—you would not very difficult to make up your mind to say 'yes,' as you pretend to would. But I beg ten thousand pardons for having said what I have, for I have distressed you. Nay, pray, I shall never forgive myself."

In fact, the continuance of her position was too much for her. The picture it drew of her future was destined never to escape her.



fortable home, contrasted with the other picture of her happy life as the wife of the good, noble, kind Wentworth, whom she could not avoid liking (liking!!!), made her compare what was to be with what might have been, in such bitterness of spirit, that the big drops stood in her eyes; and Louisa's kind, commiserating accents soon made them overflow, so that she fairly burst into a passion of tears.

"Pray, pray, dear Susan, my sweet sister, do not cry. I am so sorry that I alluded to your life at home as being uncomfortable; I know it must make you unhappy. I, who am so happy, can hardly conceive how miserable you must be. But don't give way, dear; remember how happy we have been here; and next year, perhaps, you may come to me again, and we may be as happy as ever."

Poor Susan! to her no more could those happy days return. She, indeed, might come back to Shelbridge—might again enjoy the friendship of Louisa and

a halo of light around the past months; never again could she indulge those glorious dreams of the future which she had lately so fondly surrendered to her imagination. Life to her was a burden, and she groaned in agony of spirit, contrasting her lot with that of her friend, who was looking forward with contentment and undoubtingly to a renewal of such seasons of enjoyment. To cover herself, however, and, in answer to foster Louisa's mistake concerning the cause of her emotion, she replied:

"You indeed, Louisa, blessed are you with the undivided love and attention of your excellent father, and with a little idea of my lot—of the bitter feelings that are continually distressing me."

does not approve of our sitting up late and chattering."

When Louisa left the room, Susan rushed to the door, locked and double locked it, and then, feeling that she was indeed alone, she threw herself on her knees by her bedside, buried her face in the clothes, and gave herself up to the luxury of an unrestrained flood of tears. Long and bitterly did she weep; all thought, all reflection, all care for the future, or regret for the past, being swallowed up in the one feeling of present intense misery. She did not pray—in fact, she did not think—she only *felt*. In such moments of anguish, the free flow of a flood of tears is indeed a relief; and after some time spent in this bitter agony, Susan felt sensibly better, and more able to reflect calmly upon her own position. She knew by experience that when the heart is overflowing, there is great comfort in pouring forth its fulness, if only to the pages of a book; and, rising from her knees, she

ever, avoid glancing, as she did at  
last page she had written. It had  
written but a day or two previous  
was filled with speculations concerning  
probable state of Wentworth's feelings  
towards herself, her own chances of  
him again, and many other matters  
connected with him, the sight of which  
served most painfully to renew her grief.  
She recovered herself, however, after  
time, and turning over the page,  
characters she had so lately traced  
not again offend her eye, she commenced  
with trembling hand,

"I turn over a fresh page. It is  
appropriate !for I have just opened  
page in my life—a page of mis-  
wretchedness to which my past ex-

been enjoying serves but as the prelude and the cause of a far deeper, far more bitter degree of pain. But let me hasten to narrate the important event which has just taken place. He has made me a declaration. But what a declaration! He has made to me a declaration of his love for another, and that other my only other friend; she whom I love with an ardour only second to that which I felt—which (why should I deny it?) I still feel—for him, is destined to be my rival. Nor is this all. I am to be the minister to my own torment. I am to be guardian over his interests. If I find that she is likely to bestow her affections on another—if I find, in short, that she is likely to remove the barrier that separates him from me—I am myself to prevent her doing so, and am to use my own efforts to render that barrier permanent. And this I have promised to do. Merciful heaven! was ever such a trial before required at the hands of a weak woman? It is true, that I am only to do

or, knowing as I do the love that  
her, if she will accept it, shall I no  
every man's attachment worthless i  
parison with his? How can I the  
my trust, without destroying th  
chance that remains of my future  
ness? But let me, if possible, more  
review our mutual positions. M  
position to him I need not further  
upon, nor his to me, nor his to her—  
are all plain—too, too plain. B  
important point to consider is, the p  
in which she stands towards him—in  
she regards him. I cannot believ  
she loves him—in fact, I am quite c  
she does not. But if she does not

he has never declared his attachment ; and she is too modest and retiring to dream of loving, ere her love be sought ! Oh ! would that I too had been endowed with a similar armour to my heart ; would that I had never capitulated ere I was even summoned to surrender. But enough of this. This then is the reason why her liking, her esteem, have never yet ripened into love, and this is the one obstacle that I am to remove. Yes, *I, I* am the chosen instrument by which she is to be led to reciprocate his attachment. I am to put the keystone to the arch by which he is to enter and take possession of her heart. I am to prepare the point on which he is to rest his lever, and move her according to his wishes. For when she knows that he loves her, she surely cannot resist him.

“This, then, is the hard, the cruel task that he has imposed upon me ! but while I write the words, do I not belie myself ? Do I really think the task is hard and cruel ? Do I not rather rejoice that it has

power him to impose any task upon me. Is there not pleasure—great pleasure—rising that I am fulfilling his wishes; ministering to his happiness? Oh, yes! there there is: and I would not for worlds be parted of it. It is now the only source of happiness left to me; and heaven is indeed merciful to ordain that, out of so much pain there should spring such a source of consolation. It is indeed sweet to think that I am able to be of use to him, and that he knows it: that he thinks of me—not with love, indeed, but with affection and gratitude: and that he has thought me worthy to undertake so serious a responsibility. Oh, Wentworth! you have not, indeed, miscalculated, or rather you have reckoned far beneath the mark: you knew to what faithful hands you were committing the holy trust of Louisa's happiness, and sacredly shall that sacred trust be exercised; carefully will I watch Louisa's fate, and if I find any occasion for my intervention, joyfully will I em-



it; and as I recall Wentworth's affection for her, I shall feel, as every word carries its pang to my heart, I shall feel proud and happy in so faithfully discharging my duty, and proving how worthy I was to be entrusted with it; and then, if the result is what my heart tells me it cannot fail to be—if by any means Louisa is brought to value and to return Wentworth's love, and they are ultimately married—how happy shall I feel in thinking that it has been partly my doing, and, to use her own sweet words, 'how pleasant it will be to see my two dearest friends permanently united!' But ere I can feel this high and holy pleasure, I stand in need, I know, of much discipline. I must subdue the proud wilfulness of my heart, and learn to find my happiness, not in selfish enjoyment, but in the welfare of others. But can this be done? It can, it can; and, by God's blessing, it shall! Here, then, I will close these pages for the present. When next I open this book, I hope I may have made some

approach towards the frame of which I so earnestly desire."

Having closed her book, she threw herself on her knees, and prayed earnest strength to carry out her good resolve. She then hastily got into bed, and closed her eyes in the hope of obtaining sleep; but sleep is never less willing to come than when it is courted. The stirring events that had occurred, and more, the state of unnatural excitement into which she had worked herself, and the writing of her journal, threw her into a kind of fever which effectually banished sleep. In vain she turned from side to side and endeavoured to cool her hot cheeks by placing it on an untried corner of her pillow; sleep came not; or if, perchance she dropped off for a minute, it was but to awake instantly with a violent start, and to feel a thousand times more broad awake than ever.

To the young and healthy, who are accustomed to undergo the tedious

sleepless night, its length appears endless. Susan had not retired to rest till late ; and at that time of the year she knew that the day ought soon to break. Every time she opened her eyes she expected to find the daylight streaming into her room ; and every time she was disappointed, she marvelled still more at the weary length of the period which seemed to have elapsed. At length nature was tired out and gave way, and Susan slept the deep, heavy sleep of exhaustion.

When she awoke, the sun was shining brightly into her room. In the first moment she could not recall the events of the preceding evening. She felt that some calamity had befallen her, and could not tell what it was ; and then the full sum of her wretchedness burst upon her in all its force. Who is there who has not experienced, at first waking on the first morning after having met with some great misfortune, that most miserable of sensations—the dreary consciousness that something un-

fortune has happened, followed almost immediately by the sharp pang that accompanies the full recollection of it? There is no time, moreover, at which one is less sensibly to misfortune as at first waking in the morning. The nerves are unstrung; the perceptions are acute; a misfortune, to which, in the bustle of everyday life, we have hardened our hearts, appears in the freshness of the morning as an insupportable calamity. At any rate Susan felt thus; and the excitement of first resolutions of self-sacrifice having passed away, the wretchedness that she felt was quite overpowering; and, as she looked forward to the day before her, her heart sickened at the prospect.

Fortunately, however, for her, the hour at which she awoke did not permit much time for reflection. She had hastily finished her packing, and completed her toilette, in order to hurry down-stairs to breakfast time for the morning prayers, which Mr. Castleton always read to his family before

breakfast. At that usually cheerful meal, there was, on this occasion, but little conversation. Louisa was sad at leaving her father, and Mr. Castleton, who observed how ill Susan looked, was not altogether without a guess at the cause of her paleness, and he pitied her from the bottom of his heart ; though he still felt that it was better now than later.

Soon after breakfast, Wentworth came up to the rectory, and, as he significantly pressed Susan's hand, she felt the blood rush to her heart, so that she thought she should be overcome by the violence of its beatings ; she managed however, to compose herself, and to return his pressure, to signify that she understood him and did not shrink from her promise.

A few last words from all parties, and the carriage which had been sent for them from Stapleford Castle was announced to be in readiness. Mr. Castleton thought it best not to prolong the pain of parting, and almost immediately handed his daugh-

her, simply : “ Remember your  
and I am bound to you for ever  
pressed his arm in reply ;—she c  
speak. She got into the carriag  
was glistening in Louisa’s eye, b  
shed not one. She was deadly p  
ever, as the carriage moved on,  
the window she caught the last  
Wentworth waving his hand. Yea  
his heart was Louisa’s, his last gl  
upon her, as Louisa, being on th  
side of the carriage, was out of  
Was this ominous ?

END OF VOL. I.

# FERDINAND CASTLETON.

A NOVEL.

"A Christian is the highest style of man."—YOUNG.


IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:  
T. & W. BOONE, NEW BOND STREET.  
1851.







# FERDINAND CASTLETON.

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## PART II.

*(Continued.)*

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### CHAPTER VII.

WE must now change the scene, and, quitting for a brief space the beautiful hills and valleys amidst which Shelbridge is situated, immure ourselves in the smoky atmosphere of hot, baked, stifling London. The season was just drawing to a close; the great majority of people had, in fact, already quitted town; but those that remained continued their pursuit of pleasure with unabated zest, and considered, not without reason, that this was the pleasant-

est part of the season. And so, in fact to the regular denizen of London, it naturally is. The great crowd has passed away ; and those who are left, and who mostly are living in pretty much the same circle, have far more opportunities of associating with each other. It is now the ordinary run of balls and assemblies diversified by parties to Vauxhall, trips to Richmond, white-bait dinners at Greenwich, a visit to Blackwall, or some other such amusement, which answers in a certain degree to the country pic-nic. Now it is that long-standing flirtations are brought to a crisis, proposals are made or determined on, marriages are arranged or broken off. In fact, everything conspires to give a sharper zest to the last days of the expiring London season, and to console those who, either from business or pleasure, have spent all the best months of summer amongst brick walls, for the rural delights of which they have been deprived.

It is not, however, to any of these parties of pleasure that we are about to introduce our readers, but to a small back-room in a house in Wilton Crescent, which served as the study or sitting-room of its noble master—one of the two individuals who at present tenanted it.

General Lord Lennox was an old officer, who, having distinguished himself in the Peninsular War, and being, moreover, an off-shoot of a noble family, whose head possessed considerable influence with the minister of the day, was rewarded for his services with a peerage and a pension ; the latter, however, though a valuable addition to his own scanty resources, was barely sufficient to maintain, in its newly-acquired dignities, the family with which it pleased Providence to bless him ; and as it would terminate with his life, it was not without great anxiety that he contemplated the future prospects of his son and heir. In consideration of his own services, he had obtained a commission in the Guards

Charles to make him, raised to  
for his maintenance for the first fe  
But this could not last for ever.  
Lennox was not to be an ensign  
Guards all his life ; and how he  
to provide for a wife and family, a  
up the dignity of the peerage, was  
len whose solution very much p  
the old General's mind. Charles  
had now completed his twenty-fi  
and it was in order to have a little  
conversation with him on his futu  
pects, that he had been summoned  
father to this private conference in  
peer's own apartment.

Lord Lennox was seated in  
chair, with his foot, about which  
tendency to gout was hovering. re

symptoms of quick perception and strong determination could be seen, while the bright colour, which was ever ready to fly to his cheeks, betrayed a certain irascibility of temper. He was, in fact, both resolute and irascible : nursed in the camp, implicit obedience was in his eyes the best, if not the only virtue ; and though a kind-hearted and good-natured man, he was in his own family a perfect despot. His wife, a gentle-spirited creature, young enough to be his daughter, had never presumed to contradict him, and his children had been educated in the strictest principles of obedience ; so that in his own family no one ever dreamt of thwarting his will in the slightest particular. Charles, his eldest son, who was now seated on a chair at some little distance from his father's, was tall, slight, and rather good-looking than handsome. He had rather the soft blue eyes of his mother, than the piercing grey ones of his father ; and while he inherited some of the pride and obstinacy of

curls that shaded it were seen, glance at a miniature of Lady which lay on the table, to have inherited from her. His countenance full of expression, and the warm blood called to his cheeks as readily as his father's, though their tint was in far paler ; but at this moment the moment of the formal interview with his father, of whom he stood in conscious awe, had called the colour to his face, and he really looked quite handsome.

" I hear, Charles, that you are going out of town in a day or two, on a visit to Stapleford Castle, and I therefore call on you here, in order to have a little conversation with you before you go."

never overdrawn your allowance. This is all as it should be ; but you know we must look forward to the future, and you are now twenty-one, and I believe you are shortly expecting your step."

"There are only two above me, and then I shall be Lieutenant and Captain."

"Have you ever thought of the desirableness of exchanging into some line regiment as soon as you get your step?"

"No, sir, I cannot say I ever thought of that."

"And you would not like it?"

"Not unless it was absolutely necessary."

"It is not by any means necessary now. I could continue to make you the same allowance, and you could go on as you have done ; but suppose any thing were to happen to me. My pension dies with me, and I have to make some provision for your brothers and sisters ; I fear you would find it very difficult to keep up your position as a peer, on your pay as Lieu-

ment in the Guards and the small income that you would inherit from me."

"But supposing I did exchange into the line now, I could hardly remain there when I had come to the title. A peer of the realm would feel it rather beneath his dignity to be a mere captain in a marching regiment; would he not, sir?"

"To serve your country can never be beneath your dignity, my dear Charles. I agree, however, that the increase in your pay would not be sufficient to make any perceptible difference in your means of supporting your rank. But your absence from London would save you the necessity of doing so. You would have no appearances to support in the West Indies."

"Perhaps not, sir; but I think I would rather live in town in a style rather beneath my dignity, than in the West Indies or some equally agreeable locality, where I should have no dignity to keep up. But, after all, I shall not find my rank so very irksome. You know I shall have no country place to maintain. I need have



no regular house in town. I may live in lodgings, dine at my club ; and if I can keep my cab and a couple of horses, and spend a hundred or so on my dress and personal expenses, no one will accuse me of living beneath my rank—and all that I can do easily on £2,000 a-year ; and I suppose you will not leave me much less than that ?”

“No, that is about the mark ; but all this is very well, as long as you remain a bachelor. But suppose you want to marry ? You will naturally wish for a heir to inherit your rank. And, besides, you know young men do occasionally fall in love.”

“Very true, sir ; but young men are not always able to indulge their inclinations in that respect ; and, though I shall be a peer, I must remember that I am a very poor one, and cannot indulge in the luxury of marrying where I love, unless, indeed, the *objet aimé* happens also to be an heiress. In short, if I marry at all, it must be some one with money. And

at that way I may turn my rank to some account. For many a wealthy papa would loose his purse-strings to win a coronet for his daughter, who would have turned a deaf ear to all entreaties, had she set her affections on some untitled individual, who was equally embarrassed by his poverty.

— Upon my word, Master Charles, you have taken a more sensible view of this subject than I gave you credit for; though I confess I think your speech betrays that you have never yet been in love, and do not know the real power of that overmastering affection. However, I sincerely hope that you will always be able to exercise the discreet forbearance that you profess, in which case you may indeed manage very well for yourself, and relieve my mind from a great weight of care. I do not wish to make you conceited, but you know very well that you are endowed with gifts that make their way to the hearts of women more than mere beauty of features. And if you will really say about it, I have no doubt that you may

captivate the affections of some wealthy heiress, in which case, as you observe, I think it highly probable that her father may readily consent to barter some of his gold for your future coronet. But remember, Charles, I have heard of some of your doings: you are a great flirt; the success that you meet with in your flirtations, naturally urges you on to more; and I have heard of several cases which, young as you are, have threatened to become serious. Take care that you do not become entangled before you are aware of it. Those very powers that, properly employed, may make your fortune, may, very possibly, if incautiously used, lead you into a very serious scrape. You will flirt with some pretty, penniless girl. You will find accidentally, perhaps unexpectedly, that, on her side, the flirtation has merged into a real passion. Even if you escape a similar danger yourself, feelings of compassion and pity will be aroused, which will inevitably lead to love, and you will finally find yourself entangled

in a love-match, which will in the end render you and all belonging to you miserable for the rest of your lives."

"A thousand thanks for your cautions, sir; I will endeavour to profit by them, though I think the accounts you have heard of my flirtations have been a little exaggerated."

"Perhaps a little, perhaps a little; but I can give them credit for a good deal of truth. I was a bit of a flirt myself when I was at your age, and there is an expression which I have myself seen in your countenance, when you have been 'doing the agreeable,' that reminds me very much of my by-gone days. Some people, and I believe you are one of the number, flirt more than they intend, or than they know themselves, from the mere desire of making themselves agreeable, and shining in conversation. However, I don't find fault with you for it, as long as you do not carry it too far—by which I mean as long as you neither entangle

yourself, nor ruin any girl's happiness by raising false expectations."

"Trust me, my dear father, young ladies' hearts are not so easily broken as you think for."

"Hearts seldom break, Charles, but they often bleed. In cases of this nature it is a woman's pride to conceal the pain she feels ; but that pain is not the less acute. The wound is not the less dangerous because it bleeds inwardly, and nothing is seen on the surface. I sincerely believe that many a man—aye, and many a kind-hearted, well-meaning man, who would not intentionally hurt a fly—has gone on his way without a single sting of conscience, while the girl with whom he has had what he thinks a trifling flirtation, has carried an aching heart with her to her grave. It is incalculable the harm that men, and especially those who possess that dangerous power of fascination, occasionally inflict in sheer carelessness and thoughtlessness. And then you must re-

sequently, able to marry whom you like, while a penniless younger son is likely to be so utterly out of the question as to be out of the band, that there is some sort of excuse for his thoughtlessness."

"Well, sir, I will try and follow your advice, and you shall see how well we behave during my visit at St. George's Castle."

"Ah! that will indeed be a trial. There is no place where there is so much temptation and opportunity for sin as in a large well-filled house in the country, especially when it is presided over by a gay young married lady like Lady Barbara. Do you know at all who

“Yes, it must be, for Lord Abbotsham has no children.”

“Poor fellow ! how well I remember the death of his wife. He was as gay a young man as you are, Charles, as fond of society and as well calculated to shine in it. He formed an attachment, which was most warmly returned ; but he was only a younger son, and her father would not hear of the marriage taking place. It was brought about at last, however ; but her health had been so much injured by grief and anxiety, that when her time of trouble came, she had no strength to bear up against it, and died in her first confinement ; leaving a daughter, who, I conclude, is the young lady whom Lady Barbara is now bringing out.”

“I should not have thought it possible that she could be old enough.”

“Let me see, yes, she must be. Ferdinand Castleton was married about four years after me ; and as you are turned twenty-one, the young lady may well be past seventeen. If she is like her mother

though she is an only child, her  
can be nothing like what you will r

"But if Lord Abbotsham has 1  
dren, may she not eventually be hi  
as well as her father's?"

"Possibly ; but Lord Abbotsham  
comparatively young, and a t  
things might happen to prevent  
succeeding to his property ; and,  
suppose she does eventually, what  
to do in the meantime?"

"Oh ! if that was all, it would b  
while being a little pinched for sor  
to be at last lord of the Stapleford  
But, however, we need not disc  
point yet. I have never even a  
young lady in question."



"At any rate, sir, I will do my best to follow your advice in this, as in all other matters. Have you anything more you wished to say to me?"

"No, I believe that is all. Farewell."

"Good bye, sir."

As the young man left the room, Lord Lennox threw himself back in his arm-chair in an attitude of deep reflection.

"For all that boy says of his prudence, I can't quite trust him. I believe he thinks what he says at present ; but, if I am not very much mistaken, the day will come when his prudence will be sorely tried. He is not made of that cold, calculating stuff that he pretends to be. There is that in his eye which speaks of a warmth and passion which only awaits a spark to kindle it. He might do worse, though, than fall in love with that Castleton girl. She comes of a good stock, and has a chance of being an immense heiress. At any rate, I have done my duty, and have put him well on his guard."

When Charles Lennox left his father's presence he quitted the house, and bent his steps across the Green Park in a very pensive mood. Many things combined to render him serious. In the first place, his father's remarks upon his real or supposed flirtations, and the dangerous consequences which might result from them, had made a greater impression on his mind than he had allowed his father to observe. He felt that he was, in some respects, a type of the class on which his father had commented. He was kind-hearted; he was well-intentioned; he would not willingly hurt a fly, as his father had expressed it; but was it then possible that he had been the means of causing unhappiness to any of the fair creatures for whom he had felt a passing liking, and whose only fault was the liking him too well: Was he possessed of those fascinations which his father had attributed to him? At first he pooh-poohed the idea—for Charles Lennox was not a self-confident man; had he been

so, he would have been far less dangerous. It was the very doubt that he felt of his own powers of pleasing that led him to exert them to the utmost, just to put them to the test of experiment. Had he felt always sure of making a conquest, the excitement would have been wanting which made the attempt so delightful to him ; but, being naturally diffident of his own capabilities, every additional proof that he received of their sufficiency gave him an intoxicating pleasure which drowned the reproaches of his conscience, which was, moreover, deadened by the same feeling. If he thought it unlikely that he should produce an impression, he thought it much more unlikely that it should be a permanent one ; and if, therefore, conscience did make herself heard, she was speedily silenced by the reproach, that nothing but the most overweening vanity could have led to his imagining that there was any danger of his having worked any lasting injury. He therefore at first rejected the

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notion that he could be so dangerous as Lord Lennox had represented. "Parents are so partial," he said to himself; "and then, the old fellow thinks that, because young ladies prefer my conversation to his, they therefore prefer it to everything else's. 'That's all my eye,' as I said to him; 'young ladies' hearts do not break so easily as all that comes to.'"

But even as these reflections passed through his mind, other thoughts came crowding upon his recollection. He could not refrain from calling to mind many instances in which he had obtained undoubted proofs of his having gained ascendancy over women's hearts. True, on him the impression had been evanescent, but was it so certain that it had been equally so on them? "But what am I to do, then?" thought he. "Marry I cannot, purely from mercenary motives. I had much rather remain a bachelor. To marry I cannot, unless with personal merits my fair charmer shall combine."

handsome dowry. My chance of marriage is therefore very problematical ; but am I, then, to give up women's society altogether ; or, continuing in society, am I to give up endeavouring to make myself agreeable ?—that would be absurd. No, no, they must take care of themselves, which, after all, I have no doubt they are perfectly capable of doing ; and if they do occasionally experience a passing pang, the pleasure that their vanity has derived from my attentions *has* probably amply compensated for it."

By the time he had arrived at this conclusion, he had emerged from the Green Park, and found himself at the door of a small house in King-street, St. James's. Pulling a latch-key from his pocket, he admitted himself into the dwelling, and turning into a back room on the ground-floor, found himself in the presence of a very pretty girl, of apparently eighteen or nineteen years of age, who was busily employed on some needlework. Though evi-

dently belonging to the lower order of society, she was endued with no inconsiderable share of beauty, and that, too, of a type which would have been more ordinarily found amongst those accustomed to move in a higher sphere. Her complexion was fair, her eyes of a brilliant blue, and her hair, which was of the richest auburn, was smoothly braided and in excellent order : a little cap, which she wore at the back of her head, gave her at once a coquettish appearance, while it made her look somewhat older than she really was. Her dress was plain, but very neat and scrupulously clean ; her eyes gleamed with pleasure as Charles Lennox entered, and she said, as she sprang forward to meet him : “ I am so glad to see you. I thought you were never coming ! ”

Her accent, though it betrayed a slight provincialism, was not repulsive or even vulgar ; while, under the influence of her joy at seeing Charles, her countenance looked so beautiful that it served as the

best apology for the criminality of his conduct.

"Dearest Mary, I am sorry I kept you waiting so long, but I was detained at home, where I have had a long conversation with the governor."

"What about?" said she, looking somewhat alarmed.

"Not about you, dear, he has not an idea of that ; and if he did know it, I do not think he could blame me *very* much. I dare say he has done worse himself in his time. But, Mary, I came to tell you a piece of news that I fear will grieve you. I am about to leave you for a time. I am going into the country."

"Are you really going away?" said she, while a large tear started into each of her eyes ; "for how long?"

"I can hardly answer that question, my pretty one, but for a fortnight or so in the first instance, at any rate ; but do not distress yourself, dear ; except as regards my absence, every thing shall go on as be-

necessities. You are a dear little and very economical, which is desirable of you, as you know are not over-well supplied."

"Oh! you know I care for as long as I am with you. A balance is all I require. Believe me not from greediness of money, finery, that I consented to live. It was yourself and yourself that won my heart. If I could but see science at rest, and think that grandmother was happy, I should have no cares. In order to mind, I told her that if I were. . . I mean, if any thing came from vexation, you would make an honest

CHAPTER 13



ning, that it was impossible that, under any circumstances, I could marry you. Now that I was doing wrong in inducing you to live with me; but the love that inspired me with overcame all other considerations, and, finding that you reciprocated it, I consented to afford you an asylum: for you remember that the place where I found you was anything but safe for you, and you were always exposed to all kinds of solicitations."

Yes, I was not happy there; but still now I might have gone back to my mother; but I could not make up my mind to leave you for ever. Yet my conscience often reproaches me with not living in sin myself, but being the cause of your doing so also."

As for that, dear Mary, you need not vex yourself. It is, I fear, too true that our course of life is to a certain extent bad; but then think of the way in which young men live. It is surely better to be content with one in whom one has

inspired a real attachment, than to be in the daily practice of disgusting and indiscriminate vice, as ninety-nine out of every hundred young men of my acquaintance are doing. But, however, I did not come here to argue the propriety of our connexion, for I conclude you do not yet wish it terminated."

"How can you be so cruel as to talk of such a thing? But it does distress me very much, sometimes, to think that you can terminate our connexion at any moment, and send me forth on the wide world, friendless and alone."

"And have you so little confidence in me, Mary, as to think me capable of such an act of baseness?"

"You might be compelled to it. Your father might discover all, and insist on your doing so, and you have told me that you are completely in his power. Besides, you may marry some lady of your own rank, and she would, of course, insist on my instant dismissal."

"You need not fear my marrying, Mary. I shall never marry where I do not love, and as long as I love you, I am not likely to love any one else; but if I were ever so much in love, I tell you I cannot afford to marry. It is almost as impossible for me to marry one of my own rank as to marry you."

"But you might find some one with a fortune large enough to permit your marrying her."

"I tell you I will *never* marry, if I do not love, were all the wealthy heiresses in England and Wales at my feet. In the meantime you continue pleased with your lodgings, and the people of the house are civil?"

"Oh yes! this room seems dull when you are not in it, because you see, being only lit by a skylight, there is not much prospect, but it is very comfortable, and the people are very civil. I made a little cap for the landlady the other day, which seems quite to have won her heart."

“ I have no doubt it did, if it were only half as pretty as the one you have got on. But tell me, Mary, how did you become such an adept in millinery and dress-making, and those kind of things ? ”

“ Whatever talent I have for them was given me by nature ; for I certainly have had very little instruction. I suppose some people have a natural turn that way, for the only mistress I ever had was the housekeeper of the clergyman of the village where my grandmother lived. She taught me sewing, and indeed all kinds of needlework, and I suppose my natural taste taught me the rest ; for I suppose I have some taste, for it is not only you who have admired it. Miss Castleton used to tell me that I should make a fortune as a milliner.”

“ Miss Castleton, who is she ? ”

“ She is the daughter of the clergyman of our parish ; and such a nice good creature. Oh ! if she did but know the state in which I am living, how grieved she

would be for me, for she is the most innocent, spotless being in the world."

"But is she any relation to Lord Stapleford, do you know?"

"Yes, she is his grand-daughter; Mr. Castleton is a son of Lord Stapleford's."

"How strange! Do you know, Mary, I am going down to Stapleford Castle the day after to-morrow, and I am to meet this very Miss Castleton. Is she pretty?"

"Oh yes! beautiful. I am sure you will admire her. Perhaps you will fall in love with her, and forget your poor Mary."

"Never fear, dear Mary; I am not likely to forget you in a hurry. But what kind of a person is Miss Castleton?"

"She is more like an angel than any being that ever walked on this earth. She is kind, and good, and charitable, and yet so clever and amusing. Then she is so fond of her father, and would do anything for him. We all used to think that Mr. Wentworth, the curate, was very fond of

"This shall not leave her fatherless."

"But has she no other admirer, Mr. Wentworth?"

"When I left the country she was more than a child, and had no opportunity of seeing any gentleman but her admirers, otherwise I have no doubt she would have had plenty. At the time when her father met his bad accident three years ago, her grandmother was laid up with rheumatism, and could not go to church; Mr. Castleton used always to come to the cottage, be the weather what it might, to talk to her and read to her; she that taught me many of the things that I know for she used

be quite a mistress to me, poor, ignorant girl that I was !”

“You draw a charming picture of her, certainly, Mary ; and I am sure, if she had any hand in making you the delightful little creature that you are, I am much obliged to her ;—but now I must leave you for the present. One more kiss, then—good bye, pretty one, I will be with you again this evening.”

So saying, he left her ; and as he strolled up St. James's Street, on his way to his club, he thought of the picture that Mary had drawn of Miss Castleton. “So beautiful, so good,” thought he, “and the possible heiress of the Castleton estates. By Jove ! the stake might be worth playing for ; and there would be great fun in cutting out this fellow, the curate, too, who seems to have had it all so uncommonly his own way. But, poor Mary ! I really should not like to cast her off for anybody ; she is a dear, good little girl, and so fond of me. I sometimes feel very sorry that

I seduced her; but if I had not, some one else would, and would have treated her much worse than I do. Such a pretty little creature as that would never be resisted the seductions of all the gay fellows who used to frequent Thompson's rooms; and if she was to be led astray, why not by me as well as by another? It was such fun, too, giving them all the slip. What a fury that ugly fellow, Thompson was in, when he found the pretty maid servant gone. She never would listen to his addresses, at any rate; and all the fellows, too, were so savage, when they came to his rooms, and found they could not have their usual chaff—and I laughing my sleeve at them all, and chuckling over the little bird, that I had got safely off at home! Heigh ho! I suppose it is very wrong—but hang me if I can bring myself altogether to repent of it."



## **PART III.**

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## **THE CASTLE.**

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### **CHAPTER I.**

Louisa and Susan arrived at Staple-  
castle, they were received with the  
ut warmth and kindness by Lady  
a, to whom, whatever her other  
might be, want of kindness and good-  
could not be imputed. She affec-  
ly embraced Louisa, and expressed  
ratification at making Susan's ac-  
ance, having, as she said, heard so  
about her from her brother Ferdi-

Louisa now ran off to pay her  
ts to her grandfather, with whom

she was a great favourite ; for it must be imagined that, because there was much excitement about this visit Louisa had never been at Stapleford before. On the contrary, she was frequent and a favourite guest there ; whether having been constantly in the habit of driving her over in his pony phaeton and often remaining for two or three nights.

Old Lord Stapleford had entered the ninth decade of his existence and had for some time retired from public life and was now passing the few years were left him in the seclusion of his country seat. Though his health, however, was somewhat infirm, his mind was unimpaired, and his spirit unbroke. He was at his own particular desire the centre of a gay party, over which Lady Barbara presided, had been called together ; and he promised himself real enjoyment, in seeing the happiness of the young people. He was still, therefore, quite competent

his own affairs ; and though he no longer walk about the park and fields, as he used to do, he always insisted in giving his own orders to his gardener and woodman ; and would often say, as he said to Lord Abbotsham, that he depended upon it he would lose nothing by letting his old father have his way to the last.

When these two the most perfect friends existed. Lord Abbotsham had been an excellent son ; and Lord Abbotsham, though a somewhat careless, but an indulgent father. But if there was a being whom he preferred even to his well-beloved eldest son, it was his daughter Louisa. He had been all his life of her mother, and often said that his sweetest recollection in his whole life was, that he had done all in his power to bring about her marriage, when he saw the sincerity of the attachment which existed between her and Ferdinand. Therefore, that marriage was almost en-

merely the result of his own exertions, he considered the fruit of it as almost his own child and took a more than grand-paternal interest in her welfare. Absorbed as at the time he had been in the whirl of politics he had still felt keenly for the sorrows poor Ferdinand, and his heart had therefore expanded towards the being who seemed sent by heaven to console him. It is not, therefore, surprising that, being naturally well-disposed towards his grandchild, her winning ways and gentle attractions should have completely won his heart. And he looked forward to her visit to the castle almost as a schoolboy looks forward to his holidays.

When Louisa, therefore, entered his room, he opened his arms, and embracing her tenderly, said,—

“My own darling little girl, how delighted I am to see you! and how glad of you to come and see your poor grandpapa so soon. I had not expected to see your pretty face till luncheon-time

“Oh, grandpapa, don’t tell storie

You know very well you expected me directly, and would have been very much surprised if I had waited till luncheon without seeing you. But how are you to-day? Do you feel pretty well?"

"Yes, dear, indeed I do, wonderfully well, considering I am between eighty and ninety. How did you leave your papa?"

"Quite well, thank you; but a little angry with you for depriving him of his daughter."

"Pooh! pooh! don't tell me that—I know Ferdinand better. He will never grudge anything that he thinks is for his daughter's happiness; especially if it is for his father's too, which I can tell you this is. Do you know, Louisa, I am looking forward with the greatest eagerness to see you enjoying yourself amongst all the gay folk, and being the little queen of them all, as I have no doubt you will be; but, I suppose, you will be too much occupied ever to think of grandpapa?"

Lord Stapleford smiled as he spoke, as

if he did not at all mean what he said, and it was beautiful to see the old man's simple confidence in the young girl's affection.

"Indeed, grandpapa," said she, answering to his smile; "if you find any one who absorbs me so much that I can no longer think of you, I will give you leave to say—"

"To say—that—you are in love, I suppose. Very well, Missy, we shall see, we shall see. And how's Mr. Wentworth?" continued he, after a short pause, and fixing his eyes upon her as he did so, as if he wished to note the effect of his words.

"Quite well, thank you, sir," she replied in so unembarrassed a tone, that her grandfather saw at once that there was no obstacle there to the freedom of her heart.

At this point of their conversation a servant entered, and announced that luncheon was on the table.

Unless Lord Stapleford was positively suffering, he never omitted joining the

ily circle at meal times. He said that, as he was, he was quite able to do ; and that if he once gave up doing e knew he should fall out of the circle pether, and become nothing but a ered old mummy, who was no use to ody and was in everybody's way.

aking, therefore, Louisa's arm, he eeded slowly to the dining-room, e Lady Barbara and Susan were dy awaiting them ; and as they entered oom together, Susan was much struck

the picturesque tableau that they bited. The old peer bowed and bent the weight of years, his silken silvery floating over his shoulders, and his brilliant eye beaming with pride and tion, leaning on the slender arm of fair girl, just budding into womanhood, cheeks slightly flushed with excitement, her dark blue eyes looking tenderly r aged companion.

usan was of course presented to Lord leford, who received her kindly, and

said that to be Louisa's friend was a sure passport to his heart. She had, in the meantime, been very well pleased with Lady Barbara, whose kind manner proved a great contrast to the treatment she had been in the habit of receiving when her mother undertook the charge of her.

Sir William Pleydell was not of the party. He was one of those gentlemen who seldom took luncheon, and, besides, in this case he had a nervous shyness of presenting himself before the two young ladies, and accordingly determined to defer his appearance till dinner. The luncheon party consisted, therefore, only of Lord Stapleford, Lady Barbara, Louisa and Susan.

"We shall be a larger party at dinner shall we not, Barbara?" said Lord Stapleford, addressing his daughter with a smile.

"Oh! yes, papa, indeed we shall; nearly everybody comes to-day; for to-morrow, you know, is the first day of the Festival."



"Well, suppose you tell us a few of their names ; these young ladies will like to know who they are to meet ; and for myself, I confess that I am nearly as ignorant on the subject as they are."

"First of all, there are Lord and Lady Pampisford, and Lady Fanny Babraham."

"Oh ! I know them. Lord Pampisford was a regular supporter of ours in the House. But what sort of a person is Lady Fanny ?"

"Lady Fanny, my dear papa, is a celebrated beauty, one of the reigning belles of the season. I have no doubt you will fall quite in love with her as soon as she comes into the room. Well, then there is Sir Thomas and Lady Torton and two Miss Torton. I asked them partly to please my *sposo*, for he and Sir Thomas are old acquaintances."

"But, surely, if Sir Thomas has two grown-up daughters, he must be a great deal older than William ?"

"Yes, he is ; but still they are great friends. They are neighbours in the country ; and Sir Thomas was a young friend of old Sir William's, so that he naturally came to be an old friend of young Sir William's."

"And what are the young ladies like?"

"Like a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons. They do everything in common. They play together, sing together, dance together ; in fact, they are more like Siamese twins than anything else."

"Any more ladies ? You have got eight already, including yourselves."

"Oh ! yes ; there's Captain and Mrs. Macdonald. We could not possibly do without Mrs. Macdonald. I expect her to be the life of the party. Did you never meet her ?"

"I don't think I ever did. What sort of aged person is she ?"

"Really and truly I believe she is five-and-thirty, but she does not look it. She

the youngest looking person of her age that I ever saw. And such a talker. There is no topic on which she cannot dilate by the hour. She is an excellent person to keep a party up to the mark, for she never lets the conversation flag."

"And her husband——"

"Has few ideas beyond his moustachios. He adores his wife, and thinks nothing is, was, has been, or ever can be, equal to her; while, to do her justice,—though she has been often accused of flirting,—nothing serious has ever been laid to her charge, notwithstanding her levity; and she appears very fond of her husband, notwithstanding his dulness. And as she would be sure to have all the talk on her side were she married to the most agreeable man in Christendom, his deficiencies in that respect are not of much consequence."

"Well, Mrs. Macdonald is your ninth lady, and, including myself and William, you have only given us five gentlemen. What will the young ladies say to that?"

“ Oh, never fear ; I have got some beaux for them, though it is not very easy to induce young men to come where there is no shooting to tempt them. However, I assure you I have secured enough to make the numbers even. First of all, there's that exquisite young man, Lord Augustus Fitzorborne.”

“ Son of the Duke of ———, I suppose. I remember his grandfather well enough ; but the present duke has never taken much part in politics. This young man, I suppose, is a great dandy ?”

“ His only merits that I can make out are his title and his handsome face—but these go for a good deal with some young ladies ; and I was afraid I might not get any one better, so I asked him. I have a much nicer fellow coming than he is, though, and that is Mr. Lennox—Lord Lennox's eldest son.”

“ I'm delighted to hear it. The old General was a great friend of mine, and I

remember seeing his son some years ago ; he was quite a child then, but I suppose he is grown up now."

"He is just of age, but I am afraid he is not destined to inherit much."

"No, the old lord cannot have much to leave. But didn't you say you had asked Mr. Grote, the clergyman?"

"Yes, he is coming. He is so devotedly fond of music that it was a charity to ask him ; though I do not think he will improve us, for his ideas are pretty well limited to that one subject. But, however, such as he is, he is coming ; and then there's Mr. Thornton, whom I can recommend to you young ladies as being undoubted heir to five or six thousand a year. There, papa, now I hope you are satisfied. There is a party of eighteen, equally divided, there being five young ladies, besides myself and Mrs. Macdonald, whom you cannot exactly call 'old ;' and of the men there are four young ones—one has

a title, another will have—one is the heir of a good fortune, and the other has a fine fat living—all warranted bachelors; besides Captain Macdonald, whose moustache is worth something, and Lord Pampisford and Sir Thomas, who will, I hope, entertain you and William. Do not you confess now that I have made a tolerably good use of the *carte blanche* you have given me.”

“I have no doubt of it, dear Barbara. My object in putting the matter into your hands was, that you might all be happy and amused together, and your party certainly promises well.”

During this conversation Louisa and Susan had sat silent, but not uninterested listeners. Susan had, indeed, but imperfectly heard it, for her thoughts had flown back to Wentworth, and she was thinking how much she wished that he had been of the party—how little interest would she then have taken in the names of the others who were destined to compose it. Even

Now, the principal interest that they possessed for her arose from the promise she had made to Wentworth. She wondered which of these young men would be Louisa's admirers, and which of the young ladies would be her rival. Lord Augustus and the clergyman she did not think much of, but Mr. Lennox and Mr. Thornton both appeared likely suitors ; the former, Lady Barbara had praised so, that Susan hoped that, in the event of his proving an admirer, she should not be called upon to fulfil her engagement.

The luncheon did not last very long, and, after it was over, Lady Barbara proposed a short walk through the grounds ; after which they would go in and rest, so as to be ready to receive the company.

" Which will you do, dears ? " said she. " Will you remain with me in the drawing-room, see all the people arrive, and be introduced to them as they come ; or will you keep out of the way altogether, and be introduced to them all at once, before

dinner ? I should prefer the latter course : you will make more impression in that way."

"But I think, dear aunt," said Louisa, "I should feel less shy if I was introduced to them as they came."

"Well, do as you like, but don't talk of being shy. You must not be shy now. Be as modest as you please, and as quiet and gentle as you like ; but, for goodness sake, don't be shy."

"I think," said Susan, whose head was by this time aching very much, "that, as I do not feel very well, I should like to lie down and rest till dinner ; so that, as far as I am concerned, I would rather not appear before dressing-time."

"Oh ! well, then I certainly will not desert you, Susan ; however, we will try and come down early, so as to be introduced to the people as they come down, one by one, to the drawing-room."

"Very well ; so it shall be," said Lady Barbara ; "but let me come to your room,



now, and see what dresses you have got. I daresay you will like some of my experienced advice, as to what you should put on?"

They went to Louisa's room accordingly; but when Lady Barbara looked at the dresses and ornaments, she was quite astonished at the beautiful taste which was manifest in every thing. Louisa, though a quiet clergyman's daughter, had that quick perception of the beautiful, which is a safe guide to those who possess it; and Ferdinand himself had lent no mean assistance to the choice and selection of his daughter's wardrobe.

"There is one thing that provokes me," continued Lady Barbara, after she had examined and admired her niece's wardrobe, "and that is, that I must tell that agreeable Mr. Lennox to take that old Lady Torton in to dinner. It can't be helped; it is one of the penalties that young men sometimes have to pay for their rank; but I mention it to you, young ladies, that you

very comfortable on him, and, if possible, manage, out of you, to sit beside him like a very agreeable, I assure you, and would be quite chosen away on Lady Harcourt. I will give him a hint, if I can, respecting his going next Sir William, who will sit at the bottom of the table, and then he will take her entirely off Mr. Harcourt's hands. As for you two, I think Mr. Carter and Mr. Thornton will fall to your share, for I suppose, being at home now, you must go in to dinner last."

"But I suppose," said Susan, "that she will be parted from her cavalier at dinner: for I know mamma says that it is always the case when there are eighteen at table."

"Oh! my dear, I have provided against that. Sir William will take in one of the Miss Harcourts, and while he sits at the bottom of the table, he will place her at the end. My father always sits at the side next the bottom of the table to Mrs. Harcourt, if he is here, or to Sir Wil-

him, if he is not: in that way we shall manage beautifully."

"After all, it does not so very much signify, does it, Aunt Barbara?" said Louisa; "dinner is soon over, even if one has not a very pleasant companion."

"It signifies more than you think for, dear, in this present instance; for we shall be the same party for many days together, and people almost always fall into the same places at dinner, all through their visit, that they did on the first day; so this evening's arrangements may affect the whole tone of my party."

"Well, then, I am sure I hope they will be satisfactory, my dear aunt; and I will do my best to make them so."

"Thank you; there's a darling girl! but, above all things, don't be shy."

With these words she left the room; and as Susan had really a headache, and wished to be alone, each of the young ladies were left to their own reflections.

Susan's, as may be supposed, were sad

enough. In vain she courted slumber, though the preceding night had been to her a sleepless one; sleep still refused to weigh down her eyelids. Louisa's young heart already bounded with excitement. She naturally looked forward to this introduction into society with mingled sensations of pleasure and dread; but the dread was fast diminishing, in comparison with the pleasure; at any rate, they both combined to increase the excitement which was making the blood rush through her veins with twice its usual velocity, and heightening the colour which at all times in a greater or less degree, gave a brilliancy to her complexion. When she appeared in the drawing-room, in a dress of pure white, with some drooping lilies of the valley in her hair, she seemed the very model of purity and grace. Susan's dress was blue; and her appearance though quiet and lady-like, was even less attractive than usual; her headache and general suffering having increased the pal-

lor of her complexion, and the languor of her expression. When Lady Barbara looked at the two, as they entered the room, a feeling of pride in her own niece, and of compassion for Mrs. Vernon, who had so very plain a daughter to *chaperon*, entered her heart simultaneously ; she did not, however, wish to give Susan any pain, and endeavoured therefore to conceal her feelings by saying to them : "Well, my dears, I am glad to see you both first on the field, and ready to begin your conquests."

"Are all the company come, aunt?" asked Louisa.

"Yes, dear, all of them ; I have not, however, seen either Lord Augustus or Mr. Lennox, who came by the late train after I was gone to dress : however, I have heard that they are arrived."

The first people to enter the room were Captain and Mrs. Macdonald. He was a tall, dark man, with a scanty allowance of hair on his head, but a very liberal amount

on his lip :—it seemed, in fact, as if it had been transplanted. Had it not been for these ornaments on his lips, he would have been a plain man ; but they succeeded, as they often do, in converting an ordinary face into a handsome one. His wife was rather above the middle height, with a graceful figure, a profusion of dark brown curls, a sparkling eye, and a pair of rosy lips, which being generally parted apart, permitted the appearance of a row of a row of very white teeth.

Lady Barbara introduced Louis and Susan.

“ I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Miss Castleton,” said she. “ I am sure you, though I have never had the pleasure of seeing you before, I have heard of you—and you too, Miss Vernon, for I am an old friend of your mother’s. Indeed, I think I must have seen you sometimes at her house, though I never had the honour of being formally introduced.”

Her harangue was cut short by the imposing entrance of Lady Pampisford and Lady Fanny, meekly followed, at a little distance, by his lordship.

Lady Pampisford was a great lady in every sense of the word. High in rank—fashionable in her acquaintance—rich in purse, and large in person. A tiara of diamonds sparkled on her head, which on any one else would have seemed out of place at an ordinary dinner in the country ; but Lady Pampisford and her diamonds were so generally associated, and seemed to become each other so well, that no one would have accused her of being overdressed.

Lady Fanny was tall and somewhat pale, with features regular almost to a fault, and a countenance almost entirely devoid of expression. She was undeniably very handsome ; that exquisitely cut nose—that small, beautifully formed mouth—those large blue eyes, shaded as they were by long silken lashes, and those arched

eyebrows—all proclaimed her so ; and by the many she was, accordingly, admired. A daring few, who looked for more than beauty of features, ventured to withhold their admiration ; but they were too insignificant to be worth mentioning !

There could not be a greater contrast than between the two beauties—Lady Fanny Babraham and Louisa Castleton—as, having made their respective courtesies, they now stood side by side, occasionally uttering a common-place remark. Louisa was naturally too shy to originate anything ; besides, she felt frozen by her companion ; and Lady Fanny, whose ideas never flowed very rapidly, did not feel herself called upon to exert herself much to entertain her rustic companion.

It was, therefore, a great relief—at all rate, to Louisa—when the door once more opened, and Lord Augustus Fitzosborne and Charles Lennox entered the room together. The latter has been already described ;—a very few words will suffice



Lord Augustus. Rather below the middle height, very fair, with light blue eyes, a profusion of flaxen curls, and a brilliant complexion, he was rather pretty than handsome—but good-looking, to a very high degree, he undoubtedly was. Having paid his respects to Lady Barbara, he at once turned to Lady Fanny, with whom he was previously acquainted; and Charles Lennox having been introduced to Louisa, did not lose the opportunity of improving his acquaintance; the account which Mary Brown had given of her, coupled with what he had heard respecting her from Lady Barbara and his father, having very much stimulated his curiosity.

He had not, however, enjoyed many minutes of her conversation, when he was interrupted by the entrance of the Torton party. Lady Torton came sweeping in, apologising to Lady Barbara for being so late, on the score of there being three to dress, &c., and then made a most profound courtesy on being introduced to Lady

Pampisford, of whom she stood in deepest awe. The two Miss Tus were dressed exactly alike—white, thin with broad pink sashes; one of them a trifle taller than the other, whose was a little taller than her sister's—in other respects, they were as like as peas. Pink and white complexions—round eyes—ruddy lips, and braided hair, appertained to both. They stood modestly behind their mother and did not appear to consider that they had any right to speak in her presence. Sir Thomas was a regular gamekeeper looking country gentleman—a man who appeared much more at home in a sing jacket and gaiters than in black frocks and patent leather boots.

Louisa's attention, however, was attracted from her observation of him to the entrance of the two other young men, Mr. Grote and Mr. Thornton; and she had been told that one of these would probably, take her in to dinner—not

On that occasion, but for the rest of the visit—she naturally looked upon them with some attention. Mr. Grote was a middle-aged rather than a young man—that is, he was between thirty and forty, and, perhaps, rather nearer forty than thirty. He looked very quiet and gentlemanlike, and, as a clergyman, was dressed in a full suit of black, with a stiff white neckcloth. His appearance, therefore, was not nearly so much calculated to excite observation as that of his companion, Mr. Thornton, a country dandy of the first water. When we say country dandy, we do not mean to imply that he had never been in town, but that his experience there was limited; while the country was the scene of his principal triumphs, and the theatre on which he best loved to play. In London, even *his* conceit could not prevent his feeling insignificant; while in the country he flattered himself that the grace of his dancing, the elegance of his attire, the amount of his father's rent-roll

and, above all, the reputation in which he particularly prided himself, of being a London man, would render him quite invincible. He was extremely delighted at being asked to form one of the party at Stapleford Castle, and had got himself up with peculiar care for the occasion. His coarse yellow hair had been greased and curled till it looked more like a mop than ever. His large fingers glittered with the jewels from numberless rings ; while the wide sleeves of his coat, reaching, apparently, little below his elbows, displayed a pair of enormous carbuncle studs, which fastened his wristbands. His boots, of course, had the freshest gloss ; while his waistcoat, which seemed to be fastened by only one button, displayed, to advantage, his pink linen shirt, which was in itself the very masterpiece of embroidery. As he came up to speak to Lady Barbara, he stood for a moment by the side of Lord Augustus Fitzosborne. A greater contrast could not well be conceived. Both were

dandies ; but Lord Augustus was a thorough gentleman, and, though his clothes were of the newest cut, and arranged with the most scrupulous care, they seemed only the more to belong to him, and to have been made for him ; while Robert Thornton looked as if he had been made as a peg to hang a bundle of fine clothes on. The dandyism which was almost offensive in the one, seemed a natural adjunct to the other.

Mr. Thornton was introduced to Louisa, but Mr. Lennox did not appear disposed to surrender his prize so quietly ; and, after a very short time, he interposed an observation of his own, to which Louisa was only too glad to reply ; for she thought if Mr. Thornton were destined to take her in to dinner, she should have quite enough of him before the evening was over.

Lady Barbara having ordered the servant to inform Lord Stapleford that they were ready for dinner, the old man now entered the room, and, bowing gracefully

...beyond his  
arm to Lady Pampi  
dinner. Lord Aug  
be told to take in L  
her his arm, led her  
self next to the bott  
he might have Lady  
neighbour.

Up to this time I  
a hope that he mig  
mitted to escort M  
Lady Barbara coming  
pered in his ear,—

"I am afraid, Mr.  
afford you a *young* lac  
in Lady Torton ; but a  
of the table, and Sir  
charge of her and r

to talk to Lady Torton while the others were settling themselves, he threw many an anxious glance on the unoccupied chair at his right hand.

Lord Stapleford was seated at the middle of the table, with Lady Pampisford on his left; and Sir Thomas Torton, leading in Mrs. Macdonald, placed himself by her ladyship's side.

Sir William Pleydell then leading in Miss Torton, went to the bottom of the table, and placed himself betwixt mother and daughter; while Captain Macdonald, with the other sister, took the yet unoccupied chair by the side of Lady Fanny Babraham.

During all this time Lennox's anxiety as to his future neighbour remained unabated; for he, too, was well versed in the ways of country houses, and was quite aware of the importance of the first day's arrangement. His quick eye soon detected that the only vacant places besides the two on his right, were two nearly oppo-

site, and that Louisa and Susan were the only ladies still unseated. What a chance would it be the pretty Louisa, or the plain Susan? Imagine his dismay when he saw Louisa enter the room accompanied by Mr. Thornton, and go to the seats opposite. "Confusion!" he exclaimed to himself; "and that coxcomb Thornton will have her all to himself."

How great then was his joy when Lady Barbara, seeing when she came in how matters stood, called out from the top of the table:—

"Louisa, dear, you positively must not sit there next to your grandfather; that will never do. Miss Vernon, I really must ask you to change places with Louisa."

The young ladies smiled, but did not offer any objection; and, to Lennox's extreme delight, he at last found Louisa Castleton quietly established by his side.

"Now, thought he, "let Sir William perform his promise of taking this old lady



off my hands, and then I will see if I cannot cut out Master Thornton. I *rather* flatter myself that I can."

"Well," said Lady Barbara to herself, as her eye travelled up and down the two sides of the table; "now I think we shall do. I do not think it could have been managed better. William will amuse those Torton, while I can see Mr. Lennox is very well disposed to make himself agreeable to Louisa. Miss Torton is quite good enough for that smart fellow Thornton to exercise his genius upon; and she will be delighted with the attention of so fine a gentleman. Captain Macdonald and Lord Augustus will contrive between them to keep up a conversation with Lady Fanny. I should think Mr. Grote will suit Susan Vernon, who seems a quiet, retiring girl, quite as well as any one else; while Mrs. Macdonald here, on the right, will serve to enliven our end of the table, which, without her, might become the least in the world dullish. At any rate, I

have done my part ; and if Mr. Lennox is not grateful to me for contriving that he should have the prettiest room at his elbow, he will be more than the rest of his ungrateful set. At present, though, I see he has not a young Thornton is in full play. He is in the long run, the Lennox will be the winner. I have no doubt, though his taking in to dinner has given him rather a

## CHAPTER II.

"HAVE you ever been at a musical festival before?" began Mr. Thornton, thinking it necessary to say something to his fair companion, and not knowing well how to begin.

"No, never," replied Louisa. "I was not considered old enough to go to the last one, three years ago."

"But, I suppose, you have heard most of the singers in London, have you not?"

"I have never been in London in my life," she replied.

This avowal very much lowered her in Mr. Thornton's estimation, who, moreover, had no very distinct idea as to who

she was : for, though a native of the county, he came from the opposite side to Shelbridge, and only knew Mr. Castleton by name, and was hardly aware that he had a daughter. Having, therefore, discovered that Louisa had never been in London, he thought she must be something very low, some country cousin or connexion of the family ; and though her beauty still tempted him to continue the conversation, his vanity was no longer so much interested in it. Moreover, as his talk was principally of balls, operas, and similar gaieties, this avowal, on his part, deprived him of the principal portion of his topics ; and he was rather at a loss for a fresh subject to start with, when Lennon who had been watching his opportunity saved him the trouble by drawing Miss Castleton's attention to himself. And commencing with a few questions and remarks, concerning the beauty of the country, he gradually led her into a long conversation on various subjects, in which

his own varied information and agreeable manners found abundant opportunity of displaying themselves, while he yet permitted her to feel that she was sustaining her part, and allowed her to believe that he was as much interested in her remarks as she could not fail to be in his. This, however, was at length broken off by one of those interruptions that will occur at the best arranged dinner-tables, and Louisa looked round to see if the rest of the company were being as agreeably entertained herself.

Her eye naturally fell first on her neighbour, Mr. Thornton, who, since the commencement of her conversation with Mr. Ennux, had had no chance of engaging her attention. He was, however, very busily employed in talking to his other neighbour, Miss Anne Torton, and “amusing her weak mind” (to use his own phrase) with wonderful stories of his own adventures and achievements. He was as profoundly ignorant as to who Miss

Torton was—but he found she had been in town—and meeting her at Stapleford Castle, he concluded she was a young lady of fashion, and he, consequently, exerted himself to the utmost to produce a favourable impression; which, at any rate, rendered him more agreeable in the fair lady's eyes than her other neighbour, Captain Macdonald, of whom she felt very much afraid, and who, moreover, scarcely opened his lips, being deeply engaged, as his custom was, in listening to the long and lively stories that his wife was pouring forth on the opposite side of the table.

She had, in fact, monopolised the conversation of exactly one half of the table for Lord Stapleford being in the middle on one side, and Miss Anne Torton on the other, all above them were completely enthralled by the gay chatter and winning glances of the vivacious lady, who would have been by no means contented with any smaller audience, and, indeed, for the matter, would willingly have engrossed th

table. In the present case, however, that was impossible, so she contented herself with establishing her supremacy over her own half of it, which she did thoroughly, watching with the utmost vigilance any casual attempt on the part of any one to establish a conversation with her own, and bringing down the offender with the most rapid and unerring aim. If, for example, Lord Augustus ventured to speak to Lady Fanny, the latter was barely time to reply, before she was immediately addressed across the table by her sister-in-law, *à-vis*, and compelled to bear witness to the truth of some assertion that she was making, or some denial that she was persisting in. In this way she contrived to include the whole of those within the room into her particular circle, in which she was the only person permitted to speak, except at very rare and occasional intervals. When Louisa's attention was directed towards her, she was narrating the story of the adventures which had

befallen her as she returned from Richmond one night, after a ball.

“I was coming home, you know, in George’s cab. You know I like being with dear George, and he likes driving; so that I just take a bonnet with me, put it in the cab, throw a shawl over my shoulders and am ready to drive wherever he likes. Well, it had been a beautiful evening, but during the time we were at the ball the weather had changed, and there was a kind of thick mist. I dare say you remember Lord Augustus, for I know you were there,” said she, addressing Lord Augustus to whom Lady Barbara had just ventured to make an observation. “But whether you remember or not, it was a very thick mist; and when I got into the cab, I was so hot with dancing, that dear George was afraid I should take cold; so what do you think he did? he took his own great coat and tied the arms of it round my neck so you may fancy what a figure I was; I had my old straw bonnet on, and George’s great coat



by the arms round my neck. Well, started all right ; but we had not gone before we met one of the Richmond buses. What it could have been ; at that time of the morning I can't but I suppose it had been hired by a private party. Well, this omnibus coming along very rapidly, on the right side of the road. George shouted, I screamed, but it was of no use ; he drove as close to the bank as he could, but, however, the great thing came at us and took one wheel bodily off, there we lay sprawling in the road. Fortunately, we were neither of us hurt. I only fancy the horrid brute of a driver stopped to inquire whether we were or dead ! Well, the groom, who had sent flying into the hedge, contrived to get out, none the worse except for a few scratches, and went to the horse's head, when George and I got out somehow. We determined to stop the first car that passed, going to town, and ask

for a lift for me. Well, the first carriage that came by was the Marchioness L——'s. So we stopped it, and she very kindly promised to take me. But just as I was going to get in, they all burst out laughing so much, that I was quite frightened; for I had quite forgotten the fact that I was. Only fancy my old bonnet bent and broken by the fall, and George's great coat tied round my neck, with my white ball dress and white satin shoes appearing beneath. When I thought of it, I was so amused that I burst out laughing too, and we all laughed all the way up to town."

As Mrs. Macdonald concluded her story and was just starting off with a fresh one, Mr. Lennox again addressed Louisa, and said, with a smile—

"Did you never meet Mrs. Macdonald before?"

"No, never. Is she not a very agreeable person?"

"That depends entirely on circumstances."

ces. She is, undoubtedly, a very  
t talker; and if one has nothing  
r to do than to listen to her stories,  
s, to a certain extent, agreeable—but  
nfess that I sometimes think her a

. One thing, however, I will say in  
favour, that, except from sheer care-  
lessness, I never have heard her tell an ill-  
red story. In the multitude of anec-  
s she relates, certain things are nar-  
l, or invented, that many people would  
let alone; but there is never any in-  
on of annoying or injuring any one in  
hing Mrs. Macdonald says.”

That is a very great point in her  
ur, certainly,” replied Louisa; and her  
ghts reverted to Mrs. Vernon, who,  
remembered, was also a great talker,  
in the case of whose stories the point  
rally lay in the venom. This reflec-  
naturally led her to compare the two;  
she could not fail to remark that,  
e extreme volubility was common to  
t, in nearly every other respect they

were as different as they were in the personal appearance. She had not, however, time to pursue the subject further as Lady Barbara now made the signal for the ladies to retire to the drawing-room.

As soon as they had entered the room they were immediately held captive by Mrs. Macdonald, who harangued them all without intermission, until the re-appearance of the gentlemen caused a temporary interruption. Lord Augustus now advanced to talk to Louisa, and, being pretty well versed in the art of small talk managed to make himself tolerably agreeable, though his talk was of the very smallest. Lennox entered into a lively argument with Lady Barbara respecting the merits of the last opera; while Thornton, who had been rather smitten by the personal charms of Mrs. Macdonald, who had been sitting nearly opposite to him at dinner, advanced boldly to the encounter with that redoubtable lady.

Susan, who had devoted herself to t

Miss Tortons, continued her endeavours to amuse them, as the gentlemen did not seem inclined to come to her assistance, but stood variously grouped, drinking their coffee and continuing the conversation which had been interrupted by her leaving the dining-room.

After tea, Lady Barbara came up to Susan to ask her to sing. She, however, declined that she might, for the present, be excused, as she really felt too nervous to perform before so many strangers, but promised she would do so in a day or two, as she had become a little better acquainted with them. In the meantime, however, Lady Barbara pressed her, at any rate, to play something.

Susan thought of Lord Abbotsham's suggestion of Susan being desired to play for her mother, "just to take the edge off people's shyness," and thought that she was now much in the same position. She could not, however, refuse, and accordingly went to the pianoforte, whither

she was gallantly followed by Lord Augustus, who possessed just sufficient knowledge of music to enable him to turn the leaves in the right place.

Louisa had a great talent for music, was no mean proficient in the piano. She played, therefore, in a style which caused more than one conversation to drop, and more than one head to be turned towards the instrument.

The piece being concluded, Lady Barbara came up and thanked her warmly, and Lennox following, said, in a low voice, "The silence produced by your music, Miss Castleton, must be far more expressive than any words, so I shall not attempt to thank you for the treat you have given us."

This was the first formal compliment that Louisa had ever received. She blushed slightly in acknowledgment of it, and her eyes sparkled with unconcealed pleasure. For why should we conceal the pleasure that we naturally feel at receiving

honest praise?—for it never occurred to her that Lennox's praise was not honest. There was an earnestness in its tone that convinced her of its sincerity.

And one of the most dangerous of the gifts with which Lennox was endued, was the power of persuading people that he was in earnest. It was not the result of design on his part ; but there was a peculiar earnestness and sincerity in his manner that gave force and weight to all his expressions. In this case, however, he was really and truly sincere. He was very fond of music himself, and had been deeply struck with the pathos and sentiment that Louisa infused into the air that she had been playing.

Lady Barbara now turned to the two Miss Torton, and said she was convinced that they could sing a duet, and begged that they would be kind enough to do so. After much blushing and simpering they complied—went to the instrument—and sang a simple English duet, the principal

merit of the performance being that it was very unaffected, and so unobtrusive, not to disturb the conversation of the rest of the party.

Thus passed the evening, until Lady Barbara—remarking that they must break early, as those who intended to go to the Cathedral in the morning must make an early start—proposed that they should retire to rest. They accordingly did so when Louisa went to Susan's room, and dismissing the maid whom Lady Barbara had placed at their disposal, assisted her to undress, while they talked over the events of the evening together.

"Did you find Mr. Grote an agreeable companion, Susan?"

"Not quite that, perhaps; but I did not find his ideas quite so much confined to one subject as Lady Barbara had led us to expect. We started with music on which he is very well informed—and from that we got on to one or two other topics, and, on the whole, managed very



in fact, I dare say I was happier if I had had a more talkative companion, for, as you know, my head ached a deal, and I did not wish to talk all day. But you seemed soon to get off your cavalier—Mr. Thornton.”

Oh, yes ; I could not get on with him

He could talk of nothing but balls and amusements, so that we had not much in common. And then my other neighbour, Mr. Lennox, made himself so agreeable, that Mr. Thornton had been far more agreeable than he was, I do not think he could have succeeded in attracting my attention.”

And what makes you think Mr. Lennox so agreeable, Louisa ?”

I hardly know. He seems able to talk on any subject that I suggest ; and if I do not suggest any, he has always one of his own. And he does not merely talk like Lord Augustus, for instance—he really converses, gives one information, and suggests new ideas. In short,

one remembers what he says, because it is worth remembering. I assure you I do think myself very lucky if what Aunt Barbara says is true, and we find ourselves neighbours at dinner for the rest of the visit. But now I have done unpacking your gown, and we are to be up early—so good night, dear Susan. I earnestly hope that your headache will be better to-morrow."

As she closed the door, Susan heaved a deep sigh, and said to herself—

"Would to God I had as good a chance of getting rid of the heartache as of the headache! Heaven only knows what I have suffered during the last twenty-four hours. However, I suppose the mind becomes deadened by suffering, and in the process of time my anguish will be less acute. In fact, I do feel somewhat better even now. A faint hope is already dawning upon me. This Mr. Lennox, he evidently admires Louisa. She undisguisedly finds him agreeable. What, if he lov

her and win her? He is a peer's eldest son, and, though not rich, I suppose he can afford to marry whom he chooses. But, then, is he worthy of her?—or must I, in fulfilment of my promise, step in between them? Oh! cruel, fatal necessity—oh! hard fate—to be compelled to assist in maintaining the barrier betwixt me and happiness. But, after all, it is but a remote chance—he seems to be a very good kind of man. Lady Barbara spoke very highly of him. Yes, but is that all, Wentworth, that *you* require or that *I* promised? Did you not expect me to exert more vigilance than simply to keep open my eyes and my ears? Did you not expect me to make enquiries, and diligently to search out and investigate the true character of the suitor, and the real nature of his passion? Yes, Wentworth, you did. In me did you put your trust; and, so help me Heaven! I will never be untrue to it. But suppose, after all my enquiries, I am really not called upon to exercise any

sinister influence on their attachment. I suppose I find that he is really and every way worthy of her? Even then how can I find it in my heart to rejoice when the first result of it must be to cause the deepest anguish to him, to whom I would willingly lay down my life. And, after all, if he were cured of his love for her, would he ever love me? It is highly improbable; so that, after all, I might purchase misery for him without any benefit to myself. Whereas, if Mr. Lennox is found unworthy, and by that means the match is broken off, I shall, at any rate, have the satisfaction of obtaining his gratitude. But, however, as matters have gone yet, I am reasoning rather prematurely. They have only been a few hours in each other's society; but still they do seem very much taken with each other. At any rate, I will watch them narrowly, which my retiring, quiet habits, will the more easily enable me to do; and, in the meantime, I will manage

enquiries about this Mr. Lennox. Perhaps this talkative lady, Mrs. Macdonald, may be able to tell me something about him."

## CHAPTER III.

THE following morning the party assembled at breakfast at the early hour of nine, as Stapleford Castle was at a considerable distance from W——, and an early start was, consequently, rendered necessary. Lord Augustus, on this occasion, slipped into the place by Louisa's side, having been very much struck with her beauty, somewhat weary of his efforts to enter Lady Fanny. Lennox was seated opposite next to Mrs. Macdonald; and his good powers of pleasing seemed to have a great influence over her, that for the first time of breakfast she was contented to listen and reply to him exclusively, and did

appear to wish to monopolise the attention of the rest of the party. This circumstance did not escape the notice of Louisa, who felt pleased at such a proof of his influence over others, as well as over herself. She could not help almost unconsciously envying Mrs. Macdonald, although Lord Augustus exerted himself to the utmost to please her—and succeeded to his own satisfaction—for Louisa was far too innately kind and well-bred to let him perceive that his conversation did not amuse her; and as she answered him, and smiled upon him, and seemed altogether not indifferent to him, he was perfectly contented.

There is something about breakfast which prevents its being in general a very lively meal. People are not above half awake, and there has been no time for anything to occur to afford a topic for conversation. Some feel hungry—some don't feel comfortable—all feel a want of excitement; for some or all of these rea-

versation soon flagged. Louisa and Augustus were the last to drop. Mrs. Macdonald having, at length, broken the spell that Lennox had cast upon her, and started off into one of her usual stories—this gave Lennox a new look about him, and he perceived with more surprise than pleasure, the manner with which Louisa was still listening to Lord Augustus, and the gracious manner with which she repaid his well-meant attempts to entertain her. Now, as we have said, was by no means so confident; and, although on the following evening, he had felt very little doubt that he should be able to cut out Thomson, he considered Lord Augustus in a different light. Recently vain and



for, although he had never seen  
a before the preceding evening, he  
y this time quite made up his mind  
she was not only the prettiest, but  
ost agreeable lady of the party ; and  
h, he did not wish to see her mono-  
d by any one but himself. And then  
d flattered himself that he had made  
urable impression on her at dinner,  
is vanity, therefore, was mortified,  
ing her smiles so readily bestowed  
e, who, if not inferior, was, at any  
very different from himself.

se reflections made him moody,  
and pre-occupied ; and when, just  
was going to speak to her after  
ast, Lord Augustus again interposed

Lady Barbara's open carriage was to contain herself, Louisa, and Susan. There was room for one gentleman. She was rather puzzled to know to whom she should offer a seat. On the preceding evening she would at once have pitched upon Lennox, but she had witnessed the little episode of the rose-bud, and was half inclined to name Lord Augustus. The matter, however, was settled by Mrs. Macdonald, who, when Lennox re-entered the room, said to him with the most winning smile, -

"There is a place in our phaeton, Mr. Lennox, if you will accept it."

Lennox bowed, and smiled his thanks, and Lady Barbara then called upon Lord Augustus to take the vacant place in her barouche.

Lennox's vexation increased beyond all bounds; but he had not much time to indulge it before the carriages came to the door. Lady Barbara and Louisa sat on the principal seat, Susan sitting opposite Lady Barbara, while Lennox bit his li

vexation at seeing Lord Augustus himself opposite to Louisa, bending forward to talk to her, and arranging himself apparently for a most delightful chat, during their hour's drive to W——. His position was by no means diminished at finding that his place was only by the side of the groom in the back seat of Captain Macdonald's phaeton, who drove upon his own horses, with his fair lady by his side.

The Torton family filled their own family carriage. Mr. Grote occupied the vacant space in that of Lord Pampisford, and Mr. Thornton drove Sir William Pleydell in his dog-cart; and thus the procession moved off at a rapid pace for the ancient cathedral town of W——.

Louisa was unquestionably disappointed in finding that she was not destined to continue the conversation of Lennox during the drive; and she thought that Mrs. Macdonald admired him a great deal too much. Really, for a married woman it was quite wrong. However, she perceived

that his being placed in the phactum was an act of his own; and she, though still hoping that, when they arrived at destination, he might again manage to join her, for she thought that Captain Macdonald would naturally take care of his wife, while Lord Augustus, notwithstanding his inclinations, would be obliged to escort Lady Barbara. A thing of a similar kind had passed through Lennox's mind, but they were doomed to disappointment. The day was hot, and Captain Macdonald did not choose to heat his horses by keeping up Lady Barbara's carriage, which Lord Lennox's four splendid horses were carrying along at a rapid rate. Thornton, on the other hand, always prided himself in everything the go-by, with his fast trotting mare, and he, therefore, passed the first of the cavalcade; and when the first carriage drove up at the cathedral door, he and William were standing ready to assist the fair occupants to alight. Sir William

turally gave his arm to his wife, and Lord Augustus was thus enabled to secure Louisa to himself, leaving Susan to the care of Robert Thornton.

When Lennox arrived, he found not only that the prize had escaped him, but that the two Miss Torton, who had just preceded him, were without any cavalier to escort them. To give an arm to each was too much for his generosity, but he felt that he could not avoid offering his arm to the eldest ; and thus, closely followed by her sister, they entered the cathedral.

The organ was already pealing forth its glorious notes, under cover of which the musicians were tuning their different instruments. The interior of the Cathedral truly presented a magnificent spectacle. The whole of the nave, the side aisles, and a large gallery which ascended gradually towards the west window, were filled with seats and literally swarming with human beings ; while to the east the splen-

did organ, with the well-ordered and arranged band in front of and beneath it, filled up the space nearly from the floor to the groined roof;—the lofty arches, through which every note reverberated again and again;—the painted windows, through which the sunlight came streaming in gorgeous colouring;—the heavy massive pillars, which seemed to grow out of the human crowd which surrounded them, combined to render this one of the most striking theatres for the performance of sacred music. There are many people, doubtless, who object to a sacred edifice being used for such a purpose; but they who are conscious that there are no greater feelings of devotion than those which are aroused in the heart by the wondrous spell of beautiful sacred music, think also that there can be no desecration in the employment of a consecrated building for the purpose of affording an opportunity for such emotions to make themselves felt. It always seems, moreover, as if the asso-

ns connected with the building lend  
erful aid towards the arousing of the  
gs that sacred music is so well cal-  
ed to excite. All is in harmony, and  
calculated to uplift and exalt that  
nature which is but too often dis-  
ded or neglected in the hurry and  
lt of the world.

nox, however, was not occupied  
any such reflections as these. His  
hought was, "Where is Miss Cas-  
?" for the difficulties that he had  
l in his way had increased tenfold  
ardour of his pursuit. At last,  
ng his way with difficulty through the  
l, his eye caught sight of her pink  
et, which, though he had only seen  
a few minutes before they started, he  
ce recognised. But, alas for him!  
was sitting between Lord Augustus  
Mr. Thornton, and he felt all his  
s vanishing into thin air. There were  
places reserved for the Stapleford  
y in the bench immediately behind

that on which Louisa was sitting that he accordingly directed his steps as he was unable to sit exactly behind that place being filled by Lady Torton was forced to content himself with being behind Sir William Pleydell, who sitting next to Susan, between and Louisa young Thornton had himself.

Louisa had hoped, even when she that he could not possibly look for next to her, that he might be able immediately behind her ; and her vex was great when the plump form of Torton filled up the place ; but as it not be helped, and Lord Augustus really succeeded in interesting her giving her an account of the different singers as they appeared, one and by one in the orchestra, she resigned her fate with a good grace—far too indeed, to please Lennox, who chafed wardly at her evident interest in Augustus's remarks. In a very few



notes, however, the conductor entered his box, and all conversation was arrested by the commencement of the overture to that masterpiece of Handel's workmanship, the "Messiah."

If either of the two gentlemen who were, and had been, exerting themselves to find favour in Louisa's eyes, had known how completely every thought of them was banished from her heart, as soon as her ears were filled with the soul-thrilling notes of the great master of sacred music, they would have been but little flattered, and, perhaps, not over-much pleased. She never before had had an opportunity of hearing an oratorio performed at all ; and now that she heard it, with the accessories of a complete and powerful orchestra, and the best singers that the country could produce, her delight was unbounded. From the first strains of "Comfort ye," she listened rapt in mute attention, and utterly unconscious of anything else but the music. And when, at the end of the

first part, Lord Augustus addressed some observation to her, she felt that the task of forcing herself to reply to his commonplace remarks was one of the hardest that could have been imposed upon her. The interval, however, between the parts was short, and she was soon again indulging in a dream of ecstasy.

At the end of the second part there was a longer interval allowed, during which the whole of the Stapleford party adjourned to luncheon at the Deanery, a venerable edifice situated close to the Cathedral, where a splendid collation was prepared by its very reverend and hospitable owner.

Lord Augustus still maintained his post as Louisa's cavalier, and did not quit her side during the whole of the repast. Lennox was too much hampered with the Miss Torton, whom he could not well desert, to be able to enter into any contest with him, and he accordingly resumed his former seat by Louisa without opposition.

the oratorio was over, and the car-came round, Lennox found it equally able to effect any change ; he there-signed himself to his fate, and re-as he had come.

en they arrived at home, Louisa traight to Susan's room, and said, , I am going to sit here till dressing so begin at once, and tell me how enjoyed yourself."

deed, dear Louisa, I should have at you need hardly have asked the on. Of course I enjoyed myself completely ; and so, I hope, did

h, indeed yes ! I did. I do not I ever enjoyed myself so much in e. It really was too great a plea-too great an excitement."

ut were you not disappointed that ennox could not sit by you ?"

Why, what did it signify ? I should ve spoken to him. I did not speak

to Lord Augustus, and I should not have spoken a bit more to Mr. Lennox; though I confess I think him far more agreeable than Lord Augustus, still I do not think anybody to have withdrawn my attention from that beautiful music."

"It was, indeed, beautiful," said Susan. "it lifted one, for the moment, quite out of this world"—and she sighed.

"Why did you sigh, Susan?"

"Nay, I know not. There is something in the returning to this world and its affairs, after having been exalted almost into another, that gives one an inclination to sigh:—at least, I always think so."

"Well, dear, don't be melancholy," replied Louisa. "I am sure I had melancholy enough during the performance. My eyes were streaming with tears most of the time. However, I feel happy enough now. I wonder if we shall sit in the same places at dinner to-night?"

"Probably we shall; at least, Lady Barbara seemed to expect it."

"Well, I don't mind if we do. Mr. Lennox and I got on very well last night, but he has hardly spoken a word to me since."

After a little more conversation, the ladies parted, and, meeting again at the completion of their toilette, descended together to the drawing-room, a few minutes after the gong had announced that it was time for dinner.

When the young ladies entered the drawing-room, they found nearly all the party assembled.

Lennox's eye fell upon Louisa as she entered the room, and followed her as she sat down gracefully to a seat; but he was conversing with Lady Fanny, and could not in civility leave her. It was, therefore, a moment of great anxiety to both of them when the party moved in to dinner.

Lennox, as before, took in Lady Louisa, and watched eagerly to see if she would come to his side. To his satisfaction she did so. But though

he had ardently longed to speak to her, now that the opportunity offered, he hardly knew what to say. He observed, too, with somewhat of vexation, that Louisa was still wearing the rose-bud that Lord Augustus had given her in the morning.

She, it is true, was doing this very innocently, simply because she thought it was pretty, and about as little with the idea of pleasing Lord Augustus, as of offending Lennox; she had no idea that so much could be attached to the wearing of one of her grandfather's roses, only because a young man had picked it for her.

Lennox, however, thought that, as matters at present stood, he had better not stick at the rose; and so, as soon as an opportunity offered, he opened the conversation thus:—

“ You cannot imagine how long this day has appeared to me, Miss Castleton. A combination of untoward circumstances has almost entirely prevented me from enjoying the pleasure of your society.”

"You certainly have not seen much of me ; but are you sure you tried ?" said Louisa, archly.

"By all the gods and goddesses, I swear that I have been on the watch for an opportunity this whole weary day."

"Why, then, did you not sit by me at breakfast ?"

"Because that chatterbox Mrs. Macdonald kept me talking to her, till each of the places by you were filled up. I owe Mrs. Macdonald a grudge altogether, for her share in the day's amusements."

"Oh ! I dare say ; that's all very likely ! but I shan't believe you are sincere, unless you manage to sit by me to-morrow morning. And I shall try and puzzle you, I give you notice."

"Pray don't be too hard upon me, Miss Castleton. Depend upon it, if mortal man can accomplish it, I will be by your side at breakfast to-morrow, in spite of all that even your own ingenuity can devise to the contrary. And I hope that a

prosperous beginning may make a prosperous ending, and that to-morrow may not appear so wearily long as to-day has. Is it not curious how differently we measure time according to our own state of mind and feelings?"

"It is really very curious, and seems to show that our immortal part is, even in this world, to a certain extent, independent of time, and measures it far differently than by the arbitrary and uniform measurement of hours, days, weeks, or years."

Lennox listened to her as she said these words, with an expression of great interest visible in his countenance. Up to this time, though she had pleased him by her beauty and manner, she had not given utterance to anything that struck him as being peculiarly interesting and original. She had, in fact, been principally occupied in listening to him. But her last observation bespoke a force of imagination and a range of thought—a vein of poetry, so to speak, for which he had not given her credit.



He was greatly pleased, however; his own mind was highly cultivated, and he liked to meet with one which could respond to it; he, therefore, determined to pursue the topic, and answered,—

“What you say is quite true; the mind measures time by sensation—not by duration. On the tablets of the memory the work of five minutes will occupy sometimes a larger space than that of as many years. But there is one thing that puzzles me on any theory. When we are very much amused and pleased, time flies swiftly; when we are bored, it seems to hang heavy on our hands. And yet a period of time never seems so short as when it has been passed in a monotonous, unvarying existence.”

“But is a monotonous, unvarying existence always dull, Mr. Lennox?” said Louisa, smiling. “Are change and excitement absolutely essential to your enjoyment and happiness?”

“Why, not exactly, Miss Castleton ;—

at least, I can conceive circumstances—" and here his dark blue eye gazed earnestly into hers—"I can conceive circumstances in which the more monotonous and uninterrupted the even tenor of my life, the more enjoyable I should find it. But in my past existence I must confess that monotony has been synonymous with dulness. And still I have found that, under such circumstances, time has passed quickly, when I looked back upon it, though at the time it has gone slowly enough."

"I should imagine that the phenomenon was occasioned by the partial blotting out from the memory of the events that had made so little impression. The mind only grasps the salient points. If these are many, an impression of length of time is produced; if they are few, they seem to be brought closer to one another, and the contrary is the case. In the same way as an object seen across water, when there are no intermediate points to attract the

eye, appears much closer than when seen across a varied intervening landscape, when the eye proceeds, as it were, step by step to its object, and the mind makes use of each step to collect from it its idea of the entire distance."

"Indeed, Miss Castleton, I agree with your reasoning, and admire your illustration. But what an astonishing, what a wonderful thing our memory is! How strange, that by an effort of the will we should sometimes be able to recall events long since forgotten! and, stranger still, that, without any such effort, a casual occurrence will sometimes produce the result still more effectually."

"In the first case, the tablets of our memory seem to be like a dioramic picture, in which characters exist but are unseen, until a light is thrown upon them in a peculiar manner, when they immediately stand out in bold relief. Your second instance reminds me of the summer lightning, which we occasionally see on a

dark cloudy evening after a hot day. The air is darkened ; distant objects are hidden ; the sky is obscured and apparently covered with a dense unbroken cloud. Suddenly comes the quivering flash ; and in an instant the outline of the remote hills, the distant church, the very hour at which the gilded hands of its clock are pointing, are revealed bright and clear, while the clouds, instead of appearing a heavy unbroken mass, display countless layers of every variety of form heaped picturesquely upon one another."

"Aye," said Lennox ; "and as those objects are revealed by one flash, while the next, perchance, is destined to destroy them ; so may the pleasing recollections of our bygone days be recalled to us at one moment, only that the sight of them may enhance the bitterness of the next."

"Say rather," replied Louisa, "that as the gleam of the night-lightning reveals to us the objects that we have loved to gaze on in the day, and hope to behold

on the morrow ; so, in the hour of adversity, does the association that leads us to think of happy bygone days, lead us also to think of the days when that happiness shall return, if not here, at least in the future world."

"Indeed, Miss Castleton, your illustration is far better than mine ; and when the day of adversity comes to me, I will endeavour to profit by it."

"Thank you, Mr. Lennox, for the compliment : I hope, sincerely, that it may be long ere you have to fulfil your promise."

"In the mean time, observe an example of what I began by saying :—our conversation has been so interesting that the time of dinner has slipped away almost unobserved. Let me hope that in your case, as assuredly in mine, there will be many salient points to make the period seem longer in the retrospect than it has in the present."

Lady Barbara's rising from table prevented Louisa from replying ; but she

could not help thinking to herself that every word that Lennox had spoken would be "a salient point" in itself: she thought him agreeable the previous evening; but now she thought him not only unrivalled, but unapproached. He had done that which so much flatters our unconscious vanity—he had drawn her out, he had led her to talk herself; he had elevated her in her own eyes; he had seemed to hang upon her words, to agree in her arguments, and to admire her comparisons;—in a word, he had not only made himself agreeable to her, but had allowed her to perceive how very agreeable she had made herself to him. He had pleased her, because he had shown with truth and earnestness that she had pleased him. She had already learnt to look up to him; to admire and respect his talents; but he had now shown that he, whom she so much admired, whom she thought so superior, admired her, and thought her superior to the ordinary run of young ladies;

for though he never said so—though he had never said anything disparaging of young ladies in general, and little that could be construed as directly a compliment to herself—his whole manner had shown how deeply he was interested. The earnest gaze of his deep blue eye, the slight bend of his intellectual head, as he leant a little over towards her, to converse with more facility—above all, the quick appreciation of her meaning, even when she herself thought that she had expressed herself obscurely,—all had combined to prove to her, inexperienced though she was, that he thought very differently of her from the rest of his female acquaintance ; and it was not only Louisa who had been struck with Lennox's manner : Lady Barbara and Susan had both remarked it with feelings of great interest. Lady Barbara was always pleased at seeing two people happy, as she termed it ; and though she knew Lord Lennox was not rich, she had no idea that his heir would be so poor as, in

she would do very nicely for Lennox, and that he was far superior to most young men, and would consequently do very nicely for her; while Susan had so much deeper reason for regarding the matter with interest and anxiety, she determined to lose no time in finding out all she could about Lennox's previous character and history; she accordingly went up to Mrs. Macdonald, who spared no difficulty in approaching the subject, and saying:—

“Well, my dear Miss Vernon, your friend has not lost much time in her conquest. She has bound Charles hand and foot, I can see.”

“How can you say so, Mrs. Ma-



Mr. Thornton, and you can hardly be surprised at the choice she made between the two."

"Oh! as for that, *I* took care that she should not see Mr. Lennox too much this morning, for I wanted him to amuse me; however, I think I shall withdraw from the dangerous rivalry, and beat an honourable retreat, while there is yet time; but, as for Mr. Thornton, I beg you will not abuse him: he is a very fashionable young man, and one of my devoted admirers."

"Well, then, I will certainly refrain from any disparaging remarks," replied Susan, joining in the lively lady's laugh, "on condition, however, that you will tell me something about this Mr. Lennox's past history and future prospects."

"That you may know whether to encourage or lecture your young friend, I presume? Well! you are very laudably cautious, and I will endeavour to satisfy your enquiries, to the best of my poor ability. To begin with your last question;

Mr. Lennox is undoubtedly heir of General Lord Lennox, a man of equally undoubted courage, bravery, and honour, but of very doubtful depth of purse; however, if Miss Castleton becomes heiress to all this property, her husband's property will not much signify; and if she remain heiress only to her father, with her father for her fortune, like the milk-maid in the song, she had, at any rate, better marry a poor peer than a country curate, such as Mr. What's-his-name; who is, I believe, lying *perdu* to snap her up, if she escapes home to the paternal nest, unscathed by the arrows that Cupid scatters about so liberally in this wicked world: but upon my word, it would be a shame to throw such a lovely young creature as that to be thrown away on a parson, and have her spend her life teaching children to read and eat bread and butter without dirtying their fingers."

At this allusion to Wentworth, Susan's heart beat thick and fast, and she could

not avoid feeling how much she should enjoy the life of which Mrs. Macdonald spoke so disparagingly ; however, she only said :—

“ Indeed, Mrs. Macdonald, you sadly misjudge the duties and the pleasures of the life of a clergyman’s wife. I have often been told that true domestic happiness is nowhere so readily to be discovered.”

“ Pooh ! nonsense, my dear ! you have been living so long in a clergyman’s family that you have imbibed all their notions.”

“ Not so long as Louisa has, at any rate !” observed Susan, with a smile ; however, as that is not the question just now, perhaps you will tell me a little of Mr. Lennox’s *past* life ; that is, if you know anything about it ?”

“ I know as much about it as most people, I suppose, as Captain Macdonald as known Lord Lennox all his life almost ; but I do not know exactly what kind of information you require. I believe

Charles Lennox has always been a very well-behaved young man ; a little given to flirting, but that is a very harmless amusement in general, and I have never heard of his getting into any serious scrape."

"But what do you call a serious scrape?"

"A serious scrape? Oh! I call running away with a married woman a serious scrape; and I call getting very much into debt a serious scrape. And—and—and"—

"And is there nothing else you call a serious scrape?"

"Oh! I daresay there are plenty of things, but I can't recollect them all now; and, as far as the present matter is concerned, I know Charles Lennox never has been involved in any of them. Of course I don't mean to say that he is immaculate. Young men will be young men, you know and he doesn't set up for a saint any more than his neighbours; but still he has always been considered a very well-conducted young man, and rather steady than

otherwise. But here he comes, and here comes Mr. Thornton; and as Miss Castleton has so decidedly cut me out with the former, I must even try to make a conquest of the latter."

"Why don't you try Lord Augustus, if you must make a conquest of somebody?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, I anticipate some fun from making a conquest of that little Thornton; he is just the kind of man whose vanity will be so much flattered at thinking he has made a conquest of a married woman, and one who is so well known in the London world as I am."

"And do you mean to make him think that he has made a conquest of you? But what will Captain Macdonald say?"

"Oh! he does not care. He knows that I only do it for fun, and he enjoys a bit of fun as much as I do myself."

Susan rose from her seat without making any further reply, and thought to herself

had gleaned from her. Lennox  
been in any serious scrape, but  
given to flirting. But Mrs. M.  
ideas of what constituted a serious  
were evidently so vague, and so  
to be liberal, that Susan could not  
flattering unction to her soul,  
knowledge that he had never  
thing that *she* should have disap-  
would have conferred—while  
given to flirting caused her se-  
easiness. He might be only am-  
self with Louisa. But then M-  
donald thought the matter so seri-  
evidently anxious for Lennox's  
she was about to give up the con-  
ing that she had no chance of

into a most exemplary husband or wife afterwards ; and a real attachment is often a complete cure to this propensity. Could she then interfere? Certainly not at present. She must still wait, and watch, and see how matters went, and pick up all the information concerning Lennox that she could manage.

While Susan was thus reflecting, Lennox made his way up to Louisa's side, and said—

“There is a specimen now of what we were talking of at dinner—such beautiful sheet lightning. It really is almost worth your while to come to the window.”

Louisa said she should like to see it very much, but still did not seem much inclined to move.

Lennox immediately divined that the cause of her hesitation was a dislike to go to the window alone ; and he accordingly turned to Mrs. Macdonald, who had just brought Robert Thornton to her side, and said—

"By all means," said Mrs. May, guessing his object, and being by no means unwilling to further it. "Come, Thornton, surely you do not despise the beauties of nature?"

Thornton tried to stammer out a compliment, but, beyond the word "beautiful," nothing was audible.

Seeing them moving to the door, Louisa no longer objected, and they all advanced towards it together.

The evening being very warm, the door, a large French window opening on the ground, was open behind the card-table, and, as these latter closed behind the quartette were effectually cut off from the rest of the party, and standing



hope, Miss Castleton, you will not take cold."

"Oh, no! I am not afraid; there is very little wind, and I feel quite warm."

"If you would just step out a little on to the grass," said Lennox, "you would see the lightning better. The last flash that I saw was just round the corner of the house."

This observation being addressed to the public in general, was acted on by Mrs. Macdonald, who stepped out into the darkness, followed by Louisa, who thought it less objectionable to be out in the dark with Mrs. Macdonald than standing alone with Lennox on the window-sill. It was a night of pitchy darkness, and Louisa, though close to Mrs. Macdonald, could hardly see her. She felt that Lennox was close without seeing him. The dim outline of the castle was scarcely visible even where they stood, at the distance of a very few feet from it. All nature was hushed—not a breath of air was stirring.

"Whereabouts did you see the last flash?" asked Louisa of Lennox, in a whisper, which appeared the only tone of voice in which she could venture to speak.

Her question was answered by the appearance of a sudden blaze of light, which appeared to illuminate the whole of the southern heavens, showing distinctly the two masses of clouds which, moving slowly in opposite directions, appeared to contain the weapons of strife. Presently there darted right across the flickering, lurid glare of the sheet lightning a vivid, jagged line of bright red, so dazzling as to make Louisa give an involuntary start, while the deep mutter of the thunder proclaimed that something more than summer lightning was at hand now.

An instant after, and it all faded and was gone.

"How beautiful!" said Louisa, almost breathless from excitement.

"Beautiful, indeed," said the subdued voice of Lennox. He bent so low to

peak to her, that she felt his warm breath on her forehead, and it thrilled through her inmost heart.

"Can you tell me," said she, after a short pause, "what is the real difference between forked lightning and sheet lightning?"

"They say," replied he, "that the sheet lightning is only the reflection in the air of forked lightning that is manifested out of the range of our vision, as the light of the eye is the reflection of the spirit within; or, to speak more prosaically, as the illumination of a wall is produced by a candle in a room. The bright light of the forked lightning is hidden from us by the earth or some other intervening obstacle. It shines, however, on the clouds or vapours, and is by them reflected back to our eyes in that different form. It is seldom, however, that we can see the two species in juxtaposition, as we have to-night.—Ha! there it is again."

And this time the forked line seemed

brighter, and the thunder followed closer upon it, and was louder than before.

“The storm approaches,” said Lennox, after all had again relapsed into darkness. “See, there is another flash in a different quarter of the heavens. It is, indeed, like the roaring of Heaven’s artillery.”

And now the flashes came faster and brighter; the thunder pealed more loud and continuously, and the strife of the elements was increasing. Little by little Louisa and her companion had separated from the others, whose spirits were far from being in unison with theirs; and who, although at first awed by the grandeur of the spectacle, had soon overcome that feeling, and were now jesting and talking as if the scene was the most common-place one possible. They, on the contrary, spoke little. Had they been engaged lovers, the mutual pressure of their hand would have been instead of language. But as it was, that solace was denied them. They felt, however, that

their spirits were sympathizing with each other, and that each was under the other's influence, while both beheld with mingled awe and admiration the warfare of the elements. Hitherto there had been no rain, the storm was coming up against the wind, such as there was, though the very winds seemed to have suspended their movements, and to be awaiting the issue of the contest between the mighty powers of Heaven, that they might learn in which direction they were to exert their strength.

For some minutes there had been a cessation of the flashes, when, suddenly, a living mass of fire seemed to leap from the vault over their heads, accompanied rather than followed by a crash, such as might have been produced had the heavens themselves been rent in twain. Louisa uttered a faint shriek, and covered her eyes with her hands; but Lennox, who dared to gaze, though almost blinded with the brightness of the lightning, which

at the same instant illumined with the light of day surrounding objects, saw a noble tree which stood close to the house, and under which Mrs. Macdonald and Thornton were standing, receive the full force of the shock. The crash, produced by the splintering of the magnificent stem into fragments, mingled with the roar of the thunder, and the piercing shriek of Mrs. Macdonald. The next instant all was darkness ; and then, as if the barriers that restrained it had been broken, a torrent of rain poured down in large, heavy, and incessant streams.

To hurry Louisa into the house was the work of a moment. She had heard the shriek of Mrs. Macdonald, but thought that, like her own, it had been only produced by terror. Lennox doubted one instant, whether it would be well to alarm Captain Macdonald by telling him of his wife's danger. He decided, however, that, in the first place, he would rush to the tree himself, and endeavour to discover the

ent of the damage. It was quite possible that the tree might have fallen without any injury to those standing by it, might also have escaped unhurt by electric fluid. The night, however, so dark, that it was with difficulty he made his way to the tree. He called, but received no answer. It was evident, then, that something had happened. Either they were both dead or unconscious. It struck him, then, that it was impossible to do anything further without lights; and feeling sure that the attention of the company would speedily be drawn to the absence of so many of their number, he determined to put a bold face on it at once, and tell Captain Macdonald and the others of what had occurred.

He accordingly approached the window; and as he did so, he recognised Captain Macdonald, who, becoming uneasy at the prolonged absence of his wife, was advancing towards it. Lennox awaited his approach, looking unwilling, dank and dripping as he

was, to enter the drawing-room if he could avoid it. As Captain Macdonald stepped to the window, he touched him, and said, in an agitated voice,—

“Captain Macdonald! I fear she is hurt; but I cannot discover anything in the dark. Step into the room, tell Sir William to send servants and lights, and all may yet be well.”

But Captain Macdonald, startled at hearing these ominous words proceeding he knew not from whom—for his eye, accustomed to the glare of light in the drawing-room, could not discover even the outline of Lennox's figure—and overcome with horror at the idea of the dreadful catastrophe that had possibly occurred to the woman who, with all her faults and all her eccentricities, he loved dearly and well—sank into a chair, and was utterly incapable of any exertion. Lennox, therefore, boldly strode into the room, where his appearance excited the greatest possible sensation; and walking up to Sir William



Pleydell, who was busily engaged in a game of backgammon with one of the Miss Torton, said,—

“I fear, Sir William, that an accident has happened to Mrs. Macdonald ; we can do nothing without lights, will you permit me to ring the bell, and desire the servants to bring out some lanterns immediately ?” and, suiting the action to the word, he rang the bell violently, while he was immediately plied with questions by all the party—even the apathetic Lady Fanny appearing to take an interest in his relation.

He had, however, little to tell ; he had seen them standing under the tree ; he had seen the tree struck ; he had been there and called to them, and received no answer. That was all ; but it was enough to awaken the liveliest interest in the fate of those who had so recently formed a portion of the assembled circle.

Susan, whose instinct seemed always to lead her to befriend the suffering, in the

meantime made her way to Captain Macdonald, who was sitting in the window on the chair into which he had dropped at the first intimation of what had happened. It was true she knew him but little; but she knew that the suffering heart is always open to sympathy.

"Pray, Captain Macdonald, do not be so much overcome. They will bring lights directly, and then we shall know all that has happened. In the meantime, it is foolish to think only of the worst that can have befallen us. It is very possible that she may only have been stunned by the nearness of the electricity, or even by a broken branch of the tree."

These and many other comforting words did she speak to him—but without apparent effect, though, doubtless, many of them sank deeply into his heart, and exercised more influence than was visible on the surface.

By this time lights were brought; and Captain Macdonald starting up, accompanied by Lennox and most of the

emen (in spite of the down-pouring  
, hastened to arrive at the tree.

As they approached it, Lennox saw to  
horror that it had fallen across the  
spot where he had last seen the ill-  
pair standing. He did not, however,  
it necessary to proclaim this fact,  
snatching a lantern from the hand of  
vant, proceeded to make his own in-  
gations. He found that the trunk  
broken off at about six feet from the  
nd, the upper part still adhering to  
ower, owing to the toughness of the  
; stooping under the overhanging  
r part, he threw the light of his  
rn on the ground, and speedily disco-  
l the objects of his search. Mrs.  
donald was lying near the trunk of  
tree, apparently without a wound,  
gh speechless and insensible. Thorn-  
a little more distant, had apparently  
struck down by one of the branches;  
there was a slight wound on his fore-  
l, from which a small stream of blood  
oozing.

A moment's inspection convinced Lennox that the lady, at any rate, was not dead. He raised a shout for assistance—gave Captain Macdonald, who flew to his side, the gratifying assurance of that conviction—and giving her up to his hands and those of one of the servants, proceeded to see after Thornton. The latter, on feeling himself touched by Lennox, slightly groaned, and uneasily turned on his side. He then was all safe, and the two were carried together to the house. As Lennox walked by their side, he could not but feel how providential had been their escape. Had the tree broken off nearer the roots, or had the upper part been entirely dis-severed from the lower, it must have fallen upon them and crushed them to atoms. As it was, it had not only not materially injured them, but had been of some substantial service in sheltering them from the torrents of rain which had since been falling.

In the meantime, Lady Barbara had sent

mounted groom for the doctor, who  
 y arriving, pronounced both cases  
 'very slight importance. Mrs. Mac-  
 s insensibility had been caused by  
 ximity to the tree down which the  
 current had forced itself. This  
 e her some trifling injury ; but he  
 that in a day or two, if not even  
 she would be quite restored. As  
 ornton, his was a mere blow of a  
 ranch of the tree, which would  
 e no worse effect than a black eye ;  
 th these comfortable assurances,  
 ole party were glad to retire to  
 espective apartments.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE next morning the sun  
brightly as ever, and there were  
of the late storm, save where  
tree was lying prostrate before  
dows of the Castle. As the pa  
bled for breakfast, many of the  
out to gaze on the scene of the ca  
Lennox watched his opportunity  
Louisa went he accompanied

he had been seated for some few minutes, he said, with a smile—

“You see, Miss Castleton, I have redeemed my pledge, and have contrived to seat myself next to you in spite of all obstacles !”

“So you have, indeed ! You have a better memory than I have, for I had quite forgotten that I had undertaken to do my best to puzzle you. However, as you are here, I suppose I must let you remain.”

“A thousand thanks ! and I hope, as I said last night, that this favourable beginning may be a good augury for my success during the rest of the day ?”

“As far as that success depends on me, I do not think you will see much of me, for I am not going to the oratorio to-day.”

“Not going ?—really ! May I ask why not ?”

“Mrs. Macdonald is much better, but it is thought right that she should not go, and I am going to stay at home to take

charge of her, which is the more necessary as Captain Macdonald has just received a summons, which will oblige him to leave us directly after breakfast."

"It is really most kind and disinterested of you, Miss Castleton, to give up the music you are so fond of for the sake of Mrs. Macdonald ; but I am happy to say that I shall not be a sufferer by it, for I, too, am going to stay at home to take care of Thornton, whose black eye renders it quite impossible for one so careful of his personal appearance as he is, to appear in so public a place as the Cathedral."

"Are you really serious, Mr. Lennox? Then you deserve all that commendation that you have just been lavishing upon me."

"Any favour that I may find in your eyes is too precious to be thrown away," replied Lennox ; "and so I will not refuse the praise, however unmerited I may think it."



"Lord Augustus," said Lady Barbara ;  
"we shall depend upon you to be our  
cavalier to-day !"

"I shall be only too much delighted,"  
replied Lord Augustus ; who was igno-  
rant of Louisa's intention of staying at  
home, and who looked as pleased as pos-  
sible at the prospect of a repetition of his  
yesterday's amusement.

"Mr. Lennox, we can take you to-day,"  
pursued Lady Barbara ; "for Louisa is  
going to stay with Mrs. Macdonald."

"Thank you very much, Lady Barbara,  
but I am not going to-day ; I have pro-  
mised Thornton to stay and keep him  
company."

Poor Lord Augustus ! His countenance  
was a study for a picture as the awful in-  
telligence fell upon his ears :—First, that  
Louisa was not going with him ; then that  
Lennox was to stay at home with her.  
His state of mind was not improved when  
his eye fell upon the beaming face of Len-  
nox, who was struggling hard to repress a

laugh at the success of his stratagem ; for it need hardly be said that, until Louisa had announced her intention, the idea of staying with Thornton had never entered his head.

He was rather afraid, however, that Thornton would come down to breakfast, declare his intention of going himself to the oratorio, and so spoil the sport. He determined, therefore, to go at once and put him up to the part he was to play. The whole party, with the exception of Thornton and Mrs. Macdonald, were now seated at breakfast. There was no chance, therefore, of his losing his place by Louisa if he quitted it for a few minutes. Whispering, therefore, in her ear that he would be back directly, he suddenly left the room, and rushed up stairs to that occupied by Thornton.

“ Well, old fellow, how are you this morning ? ” was his first question.

“ Oh ! I’m all right ; I don’t think there’s much the matter with me. How does my eye look, though ? ”

“Just the colour of that cloud that the thunder came from last night, only rather more yellow.”

“No! is it really as bad as that? How shall I be able to go to W—— to-day?”

“Why, my dear fellow, your best way is not to go at all. Mrs. Macdonald, whom I see you admire so much, is not going, and Miss Castleton is not going; and if you will stay at home, I will stay with you, and we shall have much better fun than travelling ten miles and back to sit upon a hard bench for five mortal hours!”

“Oh! that will be capital; but what is to become of Captain Macdonald? Won’t he be staying at home? for if he is, he’ll spoil my fun; for I hear he is frightfully jealous, and was not over-pleased last night at finding his wife and me lying together under that infernal tree.”

“Never fear him, he is going to Coventry directly to attend a court martial or some such thing; so, except the old peer,

who, I suppose, will play propriety a cheon-time, we shall have it all our way ; and won't we just have a l that's all !”

Having thus secured himself from interruption to his plans in consequence of any untoward observation of Thornt Lennox returned to breakfast and re his seat by Louisa, to whom he explained that he had been to see how Thornton going on, and had found him tolerably well, but not sufficiently recovered into W—— on that day. Louisa had suspicions that Lennox's conduct in being at home with his sick friend was quite so disinterested as it had appeared at first sight. However, she was in no mood for quarrelling with it. She did not attempt to conceal from herself that she was very glad that he was to be at home and she was naturally not displeased that he should have exercised so much civility in order to stay at home with Susan. When Susan, therefore, after break-

asked her, with a smile, "Whether she had thought Mr. Thornton was so very particular a friend of Mr. Lennox?" she replied, gaily, "That Mr. Lennox seemed to have a very tender heart." And Susan saw, in the bright sparkle of her eye, how well pleased she was to think that his heart was, indeed, vulnerable.

The party for W—— soon took their departure ; and, almost immediately after they were fairly out of the place, Thornton made his appearance with his red hair so wonderfully arranged over his darkened eye, that even Mrs. Macdonald could hardly help laughing at him, though his evident admiration of her had very much predisposed her towards him ; and she was more inclined to admire his good qualities and overlook his faults than most people. For certain it is, that the best way to ingratiate ourselves with both men and women is to flatter their vanity. Vanity is insatiable, and flattery, if it be not too gross, is, consequently, always ac-

ceptable. The more refined the mind is, the more delicate must be the flattery. But, as the statesman observed, that every man has his price if we did but know it,—so does the man know, who is well acquainted with human nature, that there is not one of us who cannot be won over by flattery, if it is but known how and when to apply it.

The flattery by which Thornton had won on Mrs. Macdonald was of the most delicate kind, because it was unconscious on his part. It was the evident admiration that his inferior mind displayed towards her talents, and his unformed taste to her beauty. For to him volubility was in the place of wit—and superficiality in the place of information. He could not yet distinguish the base coin from the true; but blindly worshipped what was outward, because he could not have appreciated any more hidden beauties.

They all stood for some time at the window, watching the retreating carriages,

as their varnished panels sparkled in the sun, as they were whirled on towards W——; and then Lennox, coming up to Louisa, begged to prefer one little petition to her.

“What can I do for you?” said she, smiling.

“I heard you promise the other night,” he replied, “that in a day or two, when you had become more accustomed to the company, you would favour them with a song. Most of the company are now departed. Will you encourage the presumptuous hope that I am no longer an utter stranger to you, by permitting me the great pleasure of hearing you sing?”

Louisa in reality felt ten thousand times more afraid of singing before him now, than of singing before the whole company on the evening in question. She did not like to refuse him, however, and so she promised him that she would comply with his wishes, if he would sing with her.

“I sing very little,” he replied; “but

what little I can do I shall be most happy to attempt, if you wish it."

There was now no escape ; so Lennox and Louisa retired to the pianoforte, which was at some distance from the window, at which Thornton and Mrs. Macdonald still remained standing.

They were not long in finding a duet, for Louisa had been accustomed to sing with her father, and much of her singing-music consisted of duets. She began rather falteringly ; but she was devotedly fond of music, had a magnificent voice, an excellent ear, and was well acquainted with the song she was singing, so that she soon forgot her shyness, and sang gloriously. Lennox himself was no mean proficient in the art—his voice was admirably adapted for singing a second to hers, and the room soon echoed with the richest tones of melody.

From one song they went to another. Louisa was soon persuaded to sing one or two solos, during which, fortunately for



her self-possession, she was too much occupied with her book to see the looks of admiration which Lennox lavished upon her, as, disengaged himself, he had opportunity to give himself up entirely to the enjoyments which she thus afforded him.

In the mean time, Mrs. Macdonald and Thornton continued their conversation, which was rather favoured than interrupted by the music. They were neither of them sufficiently fond of music to care to listen to it for its own sake ; and yet if the conversation were at all inclined to flag, it made a convenient pretext for being silent until another topic suggested itself. The reason why music is so generally supposed to favour conversation is, that by giving a pretext for silence, it obviates the necessity of finding something to occupy every instant ; and consequently gives time to the speakers to collect their thoughts, that when they do break the silence, they may utter something more worth hearing than would otherwise have been the case. Re-

moving, also, the necessity of saying something, it takes away at the same time the nervousness that the feeling of such necessity commonly produces, and which is one of the great hindrances to agreeability (if such a word, which is very much wanted, may be coined for the occasion). It moreover lessens the chance of being overheard, which to a shy person, and most people are shy to a greater or less extent, is in itself a real boon.

For some or all of these reasons, Thornton and Mrs. Macdonald were very well pleased with the music, and talked nonsense to their heart's content, even till the sound of the gong announced that that important meal, in our days called luncheon, though our ancestors with greater propriety called it "dinner," was being placed upon the table.

At the sound of the gong, Louisa exclaimed,—

"Dear me ! is it possible that it can be two o'clock. I had fully intended to have

gone and sat with grandpapa at one for an hour. Fortunately, I did not say anything to him of my intention ; so the dear old man will not have been expecting me. However, I must run and see him now. I dare say luncheon will not be announced for a few minutes."

So saying, she tripped gaily away, leaving Lennox to put by the numerous pieces of music, a task in which he employed himself the more willingly, as it gave him an excuse for still leaving the other two to themselves.

"Well, my little darling," said Lord Stapleford to his grandchild, as she entered the room, "how is it that you are not gone to W—— to-day?"

"Aunt Barbara thought it would be kind of me to stay at home and amuse Mrs. Macdonald, who was not able to go, in consequence of her adventure last night."

"And so you have been with her all the morning, eh?"

"Yes, grandpapa," replied Louisa, blushing as she thought how little she had really seen of the lady in question during the morning; "that is, we have all been in the drawing-room together."

"And who is all, my pet? did any one else stay at home?"

"Poor Mr. Thornton has got such a black eye, that he was forced to stay, and Mr. Lennox stayed to keep him company."

"To keep you company, you mean you little puss!" said Lord Stapleford laughing. "Now I'll be bound, if the truth were known, that you saw a great deal more of Mr. Lennox than of Mr. Macdonald."

"Why, grandpapa, Mr. Lennox and I have been singing; and as we liked to sing, and the others were very busy talking, we certainly have seen more of each other than of them; but I don't know what made you think it was likely I should."

“The experience of upwards of eighty years, my dear child:—but here comes Smith to announce luncheon, so give me your pretty little arm and we’ll go into luncheon together, and make Mr. Lennox envy me for once.”

As they entered the dining-room, where the three others were already assembled, Lennox did certainly envy the old lord the privilege of pressing upon that beautiful arm, which he had more than once gazed upon with ardent admiration; and as his eyes fell upon her cheek, flushing brightly under the allusions of her grandfather, and her downcast eyes, showing off to such great advantage the long silken lashes with which they were fringed, he felt his passion for her increase at each instant, while the intimate relation in which she stood to her grandfather recalled vividly the thought that she was the possible heiress of his immense property; and involuntarily his eye wandered to the magnificent proportions of the room

in which they were assembled, and the thought flashed across him that, could he but gain her, they might all one day be his. Nor was this unnatural—it was but the ~~manifest~~ <sup>result</sup> of the varied impulses by which his actions were directed. He might not have hesitated to sacrifice much for her, but he could not help reflecting a little on the advantage he might gain with her. On this occasion, however, he had not much opportunity for conversing with her. The party being so small, the conversation was necessarily general, and, almost equally necessarily, Mrs. Macdonald was the principal speaker. She entertained Lord Stapleford with the full, true, and particular account of her accident of the previous evening; and so connected was her story, and so vivid her descriptions, that Thornton, to whom many of the incidents were perfectly new, was so far from doubting the truth of them, that he completely convinced himself that the knock on the head, which he had received

from the branch of the tree, had impaired his memory, or, at all events, had disturbed his recollection of the events which had happened only just before ; and this is hardly surprising when we reflect that a good story-teller often ends by firmly believing in the truth of his own inventions. Mrs. Macdonald often was entirely persuaded of the truth of facts which had their origin wholly in her own imagination ; and in this instance she deceived herself very nearly as much as she did Thornton and the rest of her hearers.

“ Considering all that you underwent,” said Lord Stapleford, when she had finished, “ I really must compliment you on your appearance : you seem to have quite recovered.”

“ Indeed, I have, quite. I could have gone to W—— with the greatest ease ; but dear George was so anxious about me that, as he was going away, I promised I would stay at home ; however, I regret at the less, as we have had a very pleasant

morning. What are we to do this afternoon, Miss Castleton? I feel up to anything."

"Would you like to walk? There are some very pretty walks about, that I could show you; or if you would like a drive, I daresay we can have the pony-carriage."

"Oh, no! a walk for me, by all means."

"Are you a good walker?" enquired Lord Stapleford.

"As good as any lady in the land, and better than many gentlemen;" replied Mrs. Macdonald, laughing. "Dear George used to say I was the best walker in the regiment; but then, you know, it was a cavalry regiment, so that did not say much; but I assure you I am an uncommonly good walker. Sometimes, when George goes out shooting, I go with him."

"Do you really? Well then, Louisa, I know you are a good walker, so I think you might take Mrs. Macdonald to the Hunter's Hill, where is that beautiful view: you know the way, don't you?"



"Oh! yes, grandpapa; quite well!"

"There is another way, though, besides the direct one, which is much prettier and not very much longer. Do you know the way I mean?"

"I think I do; but I have only been that way once or twice, but I will try and find it if you like?"

"Well, dear, you had better go there by the shortest way, and then see how you feel, and if you feel equal to it you can try and come home by the other. I conclude our gentlemen mean to give the ladies the advantage of your escort?"

"Nothing short of a command from them would deprive us of that pleasure!" said Lennox, with a graceful bow and glance at Louisa, who blushed slightly.

"Then now I will leave you," said the old man, "and I wish you a pleasant expedition. When I was young I should have enjoyed such a walk as much as any you."

## CHAPTER V.

WHEN the quartette started on it was one of those enjoyable afternoons which occasionally appearance after a thunder-storm. The air was bright and clear, and the sun was cool and refreshing; the sun was hot, but numberless large clouds were floating in the firmament, which at times concealed him from mortals, while they permitted

on occupied either flank. Their course lay across the park, towards a picturesque hill, which was situated at some distance beyond its limits, and from which a magnificent view of the surrounding scenery could be obtained. Here they arrived in due time, and gazed with admiration on the splendid panorama which lay spread before their feet, till Louisa turned to Mrs. Macdonald, who had thrown herself on the ground in an attitude, and asked her if she felt equal to returning by the longer route, which had been mentioned by Lord Appleford.

"Oh, dear! yes," said she, extending a hand apiece to Lennox and Thornton, and with their assistance springing on her legs. As dear George would say, I am as fresh as a two-year-old, and quite ready for any adventure that you can propose."

"Well, then, if you are ready to start, we will, if you please, descend the hill on this side; but take care how you go, for the hill is steep and the grass is slippery."

Lennox could not let such an opportunity escape him, without saying to Louisa,—

“If the path is so dangerous, Miss Castleton, surely you will allow me to offer you some assistance?”

“Thank you,” said Louisa; “as you may really be useful, I will not refuse your offer;” and she frankly placed her small delicate hand on his arm, as they prepared to commence the descent, which was steeper than on the side by which they had ascended. The turf was smooth and slippery; and the boots and shoes of the party having been well polished by the previous walk upon the grass, rendered the maintenance of their equilibrium a task of no small difficulty. Lennox so found an excuse for taking the little hand that rested on his arm into his own firm grasp; and as at every slip made by Louisa’s fairy foot, he pressed it ardently, as if to save her from falling, the thrill that went through both their hearts might have

taught them that they were incurring even a greater danger than a roll down the hill. And when, to Lennox's great regret, they arrived at a beaten track, where there was no longer an excuse for such *particular* assiduity, the colour that glowed on Louisa's cheek was far brighter than the mere exercise would have bestowed.

They speedily arrived at a little bridge, under which a clear, dark stream was dashing, and foaming, and fretting against the rocks that interrupted its course, in a manner worthy of the mountain torrents of Wales and the lake district. Turning abruptly to the right, along the bank of the river, they soon reached a small tributary, and directing their course along its edge, they presently arrived at a point where, as they turned a corner, a most picturesque little waterfall met their gaze. The stream sprang over a ledge of rock in a perpendicular descent of thirty feet or thereabouts, the sunlight gleaming upon it as it descended, broken by the shadows cast

by the trees which overhung it, contributing to the brilliancy of its appearance. The sides of the little ravine cut by the water were covered with wild flowers, save where occasionally a black rock or two projecting from the soil, defied aught but a little moss to find a place for its roots."

"There," said Louisa, "that is what I have brought you so far out of your way to see."

"And beautiful it is," replied Lennox; "it would have been a thousand pities to have missed seeing it."

They had not stood long admiring the beauties of the cascade, before Mrs. Macdonald called the attention of her companions to a dark cloud which they had observed from the hill, and which had now, contrary to the predictions of some of the party, been borne by the wind towards them, until it was in very alarming proximity, in the opinion, at any rate, of Mrs. Macdonald, whose nerves had been rather

shaken by her adventure of the preceding evening, and who feared another thunder-storm.

"Is there no cottage in the neighbourhood, where we could go for shelter for a few minutes?" she inquired, anxiously.

"I really hardly know," said Louisa; "for I am not quite *au fait* at the geography of these parts. But I dare say there are some cottages outside of the wood. Our best way will be to follow this little streamlet, which, I know, will lead us out of the wood at last. At any rate, we had better lose no time."

So saying, she sprang up a path that led to the summit of the waterfall, and thence followed the margin of the stream, which led them, as she had predicted, out of the wood, and into a kind of open common beyond—the ravine which the water had cut for itself during the lapse of ages being, to the right and left, situated between two rounded hills or "downs," which shut out the prospect in every di-

rection save in front. Still no cottage was visible ; and the descent of a large drop or two warned them that no time should be lost in seeking shelter. They rapidly pressed on along the course of the brook, when, on turning a corner of the hill, they saw before them, on its margin, not a house or even a cottage, but a low black tent, such as is generally inhabited by gipsies.

“ Shall we take shelter there ? ” said Louisa to her female companion.”

“ Oh, no ! my dear ; I should be frightened out of my wits by those horrible gipsies.”

“ I think, however, that with two gentlemen to protect us, we have not very much to fear. And if we do not get some shelter, we shall be quite wet through, for the rain is already beginning to come down more rapidly.”

Mrs. Macdonald made no further objection, and they walked on as fast as they could to the tent, the entrance to which



was turned away from them ; so that they could form no idea of the nature of its tenants. When they arrived at it, however, they found that the most timid need not have been under any alarm, as the only inhabitant was a girl of apparently three or four-and-twenty, who started to her feet at their approach, and putting back her long hair with her dusky hand, gazed at them without fear, but with much curiosity depicted on her countenance.

"We have been overtaken in the storm," said Lennox, who constituted himself spokesman of the party, "and these ladies would be much obliged to you, if you would allow them to take shelter in your hut for a few minutes, till the rain is over."

"Pray walk in, ladies, and welcome," said the girl ; "but I fear you must even sit on the grass, for we have no chairs to offer you."

They did not wait for a second invitation, but seated themselves on the mossy

turf without further delay ; and having done so, found leisure to examine more minutely the appearance of their strange hostess.

She was tall and finely formed ; her figure exhibiting all the grace of one accustomed from childhood to freedom and habits of activity. Her face was a regular oval, though dark brown in complexion, and her long black hair, though wild-looking and dishevelled, was smooth and glossy as the raven's wing. Her eyes were large and dark, and streamed with that peculiar fire which sometimes betokens the presence of insanity. Her nose was fine and well cut, and her full lips displayed a very white and regular row of teeth. Her dress was of the very rudest description ; a dark petticoat, surmounted by a boddice, over which a ragged red cloak was carelessly thrown, formed the whole of her visible attire ; her feet, her legs, and arms, being bare, and showing that they were cast in no ungraceful mould.

She stood thus at the door of the tent, apparently equally unmindful of the strangers within it, and of the rain that now began to pour down in good earnest without.

"Pray, Mr. Lennox, make her come in," said Louisa; "I cannot bear to think that, in order to keep ourselves dry, we are turning the rightful owner out into the rain."

"The lady wishes you to come in," said Lennox aloud. "Pray do not stay out in the rain—you distress all of us; and if you persist in doing so, we shall be obliged to leave the tent ourselves."

The girl's eyes rested for a moment on the upturned face of the speaker, and then fixed themselves on Louisa with an earnest scrutiny which made her lower her gaze, and caused the colour to fly to her cheeks.

Apparently satisfied with the result of her observation, the girl approached, and, stooping low to enter the tent, threw her-

acquaintance, and yet felt rather  
her, and hardly knew how to con-  
versation. However, at  
broke the silence, by saying—

“ Have you been long encamped  
place ?”

“ A few days,” was the brief

“ And what can induce you to  
spot so far from the usual haunt

“ Lady, the streamlet that  
in this spot divides two counties  
they persecute us in one county  
across the brook and are safe  
pursuit.”

“ But why should they persecute  
—and who are they that do so

“ They persecute us, lady,

a snare, they immediately say that it is our work, and they persecute us accordingly."

"But what, then, are the pursuits of your people?"

"They have their own callings, lady, like others; but they do not seek to have their professions made public. I have told you what we are not, but it is not for me to tell you what we are."

There was again a silence; but this time it was broken by Mrs. Macdonald, who was beginning to overcome the alarm she had felt in being in the presence of so strange a being.

"Pray, if it is not wrong to ask, will you tell me—do you really tell people's fortunes?"

"Surely it is not wrong to ask; and I see not why I should be ashamed of confessing a gift that the Almighty has bestowed on a despised people."

"You do, then, really possess the secret—but how do you do it?"

"Nay, madam ; that, again, is me to tell. That we can do it, a th events have proved. Do you wish should tell yours ?"

"No, no," said the lady hastily gipsy made a motion as though she have taken her hand.

A disdainful smile passed over his face as she turned away from her.

"Will you tell mine?" said I holding out his hand ;—"but I su added he, suddenly withdrawing feeling in his pocket, "I must first your palm with silver?"

"Not so," replied the girl. "given you hospitality, inasmuch as given you the shelter of these ragged and I will have no recompense for for aught else. Freely and truly tell what shall be revealed to me ; warn you it may not be agreeable to hear."

"Nay, I fear not," replied I gaily ; and again extending his h:

placed it in the gipsy's, over whose countenance a sad smile passed as she marked his confident manner.

As she examined his hand, however, a dark look settled upon her face. She once or twice looked up and gazed in his eyes with a searching expression of displeasure, under which he almost quailed. Finally, she bent towards him, and, still holding his hand in hers, chanted in a low, but melodious voice, the following lines :—

"Inconstant thou art, and thy course is unsteady ;  
In judgment o'er-hasty, in action unready ;  
Obeying each impulse, no passion resisting ;  
In good ever halting, in evil persisting.  
This course thou'lt pursue to the end of thy life,  
And a punishment just thou wilt find in thy wife."

Spite of his attempts to appear unconcerned, Lennox coloured deeply, and appeared so vexed, that Louisa, who had been intending to request that her fortune might be told, refrained, thinking it better to let the subject drop. The gipsy, however, thwarted her intention, by saying to her in a supplicating voice—

“ Lady, if it be not too great a favour for one like me to ask of one so beautiful and noble as you are, I should esteem it an act of great kindness if you would let me examine your hand and read your fortune.”

Louisa could not refuse so modest a request ; so taking off her glove, she placed her delicate white hand in that of the gipsy, whom even, in the midst of his vexation, Lennox could not help envying.

The girl, however, seemed to have no other thoughts. An expression of deep sorrow stole over her countenance, and the brightness of her large eyes was dimmed with the tears which she seemed to find difficulty in restraining.

She bent over the fair hand, kissed it and, letting it fall, said—

“ Lady, it was in an evil hour for me that I asked your permission to read your fortune. It has cast a sadness over me which it will take long for me to shake off. But you will excuse my telling you ; it would make you sad too, perchance.”



“Nay,” replied Louisa, whose curiosity was now thoroughly aroused, “you must tell me now. Without wishing to hurt your feelings, I must tell you that I have not sufficient confidence in your art to be much affected at anything you might say; and, if it were otherwise, you have already told me too much to be silent as to the rest.”

Thus adjured, the girl clasped her hands together, and, casting down her eyes, said, in tones which seemed to be drawn from her with difficulty, the following lines :—

“Lady, by day the brilliant sun shines glorious and  
bright,  
But fear, and dread, and darkness come with soul-  
subduing night ;  
To-day come joy and gaiety, but if we see to-  
morrow,  
For joy come misery and pain—for gaiety comes  
sorrow.

“Oh, lady ! thou hast been the cause, to them that  
love thee best,  
Of bitter grief, unknown to thee—deep rankling  
in the breast ;

But all their pain, through thee produced, shall  
be far less than thine,  
When thou thyself of slighted love heart-broken  
shalt pine.

"Oh, lady! would that I possessed some power  
to save—

But I foresee no peace for thee except within the  
grave.

Sweet lady, pardon me, that I a prophet am of ill  
I speak but what the fates decree—I speak  
what I will."

As she uttered these last words, she  
cast an appealing look at Louisa, as if to  
deprecate any resentment that might be  
lurking in her bosom; and, springing sud-  
denly to her feet, rushed out of the text  
and up the hill-side with the speed of  
hunted deer.

"Poor thing! she is mad," said Lennox  
who was the first to break the silence that  
followed her abrupt departure.

"It is, at all events, your interest to  
say so, Mr. Lennox," observed Mrs. Mac-  
donald; "for she did not give you by any  
means a flattering character!"

Lennox coloured slightly.

"It is not for me," he said, "to justify myself from the imputations she cast on my character. I can only say that, as I am certainly unconscious of much of the evil she attributed to me, I trust I may escape the awful penalty with which she threatens me." And here his eye wandered to Louisa, who had not yet spoken.

"She must be indeed deranged," said she at length; "for though, doubtless, misfortune may be in store for me, her allusion to my past life is so utterly unintelligible—so completely unfounded on anything approaching to a fact—that it destroys any faith I might otherwise, in spite of my better reason, be disposed to place in her prediction, and convinces me that the whole is nothing but the fruit of a diseased imagination. But now we had better, perhaps, be returning; the rain seems over, and we are some distance from home."

They accordingly left the hut, casting enquiring glances up and down the glen

to see if they could discover any traces of the strange being from whom they had so lately parted, or of any of her companions—but no one was in sight; and they proceeded boldly to surmount the steep hill which formed one side of the ravine in which the gipsy's tent was situated.

When they had arrived at the summit, they paused to take breath and to survey the country before them. To the left lay the Hunter's Hill, from which they had lately descended. In front, a little to their right, lay the towers of Stapleford Castle, separated from them, however, as they knew, by the river, which here making a large bend, cut them off both from the Hunter's Hill and also from the Castle. The bridge that crossed it, however, was plainly visible, and they found but little difficulty in making their way to it, though the walk was a longer one than they had anticipated; and the regret that Lennox felt at the prospect of its coming so shortly to a conclusion, was dissipated by the

sight of Louisa's evident fatigue, which convinced him that it was, indeed, fortunate that they were now near home.

They had not advanced much beyond the bridge, when a brilliant array of silks and satins, parasols, bonnets, ribands and flounces, which was seen approaching, warned them that the party had returned from W——, and were now walking to meet them.

After the usual greetings and enquiries, the two parties joined and proceeded towards the Castle together, Mrs. Macdonald giving, as she went, a long history of their adventures to the company in general, and Lady Barbara in particular; while Susan went to Louisa's unoccupied side (for Lennox would not quit *his*), and, while listening to Mrs. Macdonald's account, occasionally made a *sotto-voce* enquiry of Louisa as to the correctness of particular occurrences.

When Mrs. Macdonald came to recount the meeting with the gipsy, Lady Barbara remarked—

— That must have been poor Ellen. Poor girl she is, indeed, more than a little damaged—at least, on one topic. She belongs to one of those wandering families of gypsies who never remain long in any one spot. But, for some reason or other, wherever else their wanderings may have been, the family to which she belonged always returned at intervals to this neighbourhood, and, in fact, became almost as well known to the neighbours as if they had been regular inhabitants of the parish.

— The girl Ellen, from her beauty and natural grace, speedily attracted the attention of the young rustics of the neighbourhood; but she repaid their advances with scorn for some time, till at length one, more fortunate than the others, succeeded in attracting her attention. With a wild and passionate nature like hers, there was but one step from indifference to the most vehement passion. She loved her admirer ardently, and he seemed to requite her attachment. They were separated,

however, often and long, as she was forced to accompany the frequent journeys of her family ; and sometimes months would elapse ere she returned to this neighbourhood. After all her absences, however, she always found her lover faithful until one unlucky time, when, during an absence of hers, which had been prolonged considerably beyond its usual term, the friends of the young man so worked upon his feelings and his pride, and decried so much the idea of his marrying a gipsy, that he yielded to their persuasions, and united himself to a young girl in his own class of life, who had long been secretly attached to him. On the day when the marriage ceremony had been performed, Ellen and her party returned to the parish, and took up their position in the lonely neighbourhood where you appear to-day to have encountered her. In the dusk of the evening Ellen made her way down to the village, in hopes of hearing tidings of him whom she still fancied her betrothed. The

first person she met was a girl, who had formerly been a rival of hers—or rather, whose sweetheart had, without any encouragement on Ellen's part, worshipped the gipsy in preference to her to whom his youthful attentions had previously been devoted. It is needless to say that she hated Ellen with all a jealous woman's hatred, and had been for some time gloating over the prospect of her misery at hearing that she, in her turn, was the deserted one. Recognising Ellen through the twilight, she immediately addressed her, and informed her, in the coarsest and most unfeeling terms, of the event which had just taken place, and which was to make her life desolate.

“ The shock was so sudden that, acting on the violent and impetuous nature of the gipsy, it made her reason stagger on its throne. She made no reply to her cruel informant, but, starting aside like a broken bow, she sped with the rapidity of thought back to the barren hills, and wan-



dered there till morning. What was the strife that then took place within her, no one but herself can tell. But the change in her manner has been most striking. Before the lamentable occurrence she made no pretensions to prophesying or to supernatural powers of any kind ; but since that, she has been ever given to predict grief and misfortune, especially in matters connected with the heart. I should have mentioned that, in the course of the year, both the young man, her former lover, and his newly-married wife were carried off by an uncommon disease ; and the common people believe that she sold herself to the evil one for the purpose of working out their ruin, and that the gift of prophecy to which she now lays claim is part of the fruits of the infernal compact. To those, however, who view the matter in a more unprejudiced light, her soothsayings seem but the wanderings of a mind diseased and at war within itself. At any rate, she always appears

to be an object of the deepest compassion, and I should make a point of going to see her, now that I know she is here; but I apprehend, from your account of her behaviour, and the unnatural excitement into which she was thrown, that she will not remain any longer in that spot, and, perhaps, may not return for many months."

"But if she is only dependent upon others of her party, how can she regulate their movements that way?" asked Mrs. Macdonald.

"I believe that they, like most half-civilized people, attach great importance to madness, and regard the whims of a partially deranged person like glimpses of revelation from a superior being, so that she exercises more than ordinary influence over the family to which she belongs, and, moreover, she has deserved and obtained so much sympathy and compassion, that on that account alone they all seek to gratify her wishes."

Louisa had listened, deeply interested, to this account of the strange being, whose predictions had made such an impression upon her so short a time ago ; and while the circumstances of her case gave some explanation of the mystery of her prediction, and removed much of the weight which, in spite of herself, she could not help attaching to it, they served to interest her all the more in her fate.

She had now begun herself to feel the mighty power of love ; and as she contemplated the possibility of Lennox deliberately seeking her love, and then heartlessly casting her off, she felt with a shudder that if in that way the gipsy's prediction were to be accomplished, her fate would be too dreadful to be borne. She thought of how short a time she had known him, and of the mastery that he had already won over her heart ; and she pictured to herself this power, this mastery, being infinitely increased as time gave him new opportunities of exercising

it ; and then, when her whole soul had been surrendered to him—to be cast off—oh, horrible !—her heart sickened at the bare thought. Would it not then be wise to restrain herself, to keep the key of her heart in her own power, until Lennox formally applied for it. Alas ! it was gone, she was under the spell, and would no more free herself from its influence, than the hapless bird, which, enchanted by the serpent's gaze, flies in narrower and still narrower circles, till it drops exhausted into its mouth. But while she could not but, to a certain extent, admit this, she consoled herself with the assurance that she was at least as certain of the reality of his affection. She had seen it in his eyes, she had felt it in his touch. There is a magic in mutual love which speedily enables it to make itself understood when no untoward circumstances intervene ; and in this case there were none such—no opposing parents, no intriguing rivals—Lennox had no one to restrain him, and

attempted not to restrain himself, but himself be borne unresistingly along the current of his passions. Those were for the present Louisa's natural ardours were not ill-pleased to see a mutual liking springing up between her and one of whom the world spoke well, whose agreeable manners and conversation had won their own regard. Susan, indeed, was watching with an anxious eye; but she was far too well pleased at serving the prospering of an affair which promised to remove the great obstacle to the attainment of her own heart's desire, to wish to cast any impediment in the way. She had, in compliance with her friend and her promise, made various enquiries concerning Mr. Lennox; they had been answered, and satisfactorily. Why should not she then be satisfied with what appeared to meet with such general approbation, and was so peculiarly propitious to her own ultimate views? Feelings such as these occupied their minds

as they returned to the house to  
and as Mrs. Macdonald found many  
listener to her story amongst those  
not take so lively an interest in the  
our heroine, both she and Susan  
on in silence, each busy with her  
thoughts.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE following day they all went in to W——, for the third and last day's performance at the cathedral; and this time Lennox obtained without difficulty a seat in Lady Barbara's carriage, as Lord Augustus had in despair given up all further opposition. The oratorio on this occasion was Haydn's *chef-d'œuvre*, the "Creation;" and its performance would at any other time have held Louisa entranced nearly, if not quite, as much as the "Messiah," which she had heard two days previously. Now, however, she found her thoughts strangely wandering. It was no longer the eager, undivided attention which she

had paid before. If he spoke, she was anxious to listen ; and when he was silent, she felt that no melody had such a charm for her ear as the music of his voice. At one time she did indeed listen to the oratorio with rapt attention:—it was when the performance had arrived at those verses so beautifully descriptive of the love and happiness of our first parents, at their first creation. For some time after this, she did not turn her eyes to his ; but the soft music had stolen in upon her soul, and left there an indelible impression. On the whole, however, she pronounced her opinion that the “ Creation ” was far inferior in sublimity and interest to the “ Messiah,” without being herself entirely conscious of the effect which her own peculiar position had in biassing her judgment. She admitted, however, to herself, that she had enjoyed herself immensely, and that, on the whole, she had certainly been better pleased than on the previous occasion.



The next day was to be devoted to repose, that they might all be fresh for the ball, which was to take place in the evening. The morning, therefore, was spent in music, singing, working, and reading, while in the afternoon they lounged about the pleasure-grounds, ate strawberries and cream under the shade of the trees, or indulged in some of those quiet amusements which are generally to be found in a well-arranged country-house.

"How nice it would be to have a sail to-day!" observed Mrs. Macdonald, as she and some others of the party were sauntering by the side of a large sheet of water which ornamented the grounds.

"Well, there are two boats," said Lady Barbara, "but I do not know whether they are in a condition to be used. It is a long time since any one has made any use of them."

"At any rate, let us go and see," answered Mrs. Macdonald.

They accordingly proceeded to the boat.

house, but found that, as it had not been expected that their services would be required, the two boats, partly from leakage, partly from dust and cobwebs, were in such a state as precluded the idea of making any *comfortable* use of them. However, Lady Barbara promised that she would give orders that they should all be in readiness, in case they were wanted on the morrow, when lassitude after the ball might make them peculiarly acceptable.

"I hope, Miss Castleton," said Lennox, as they were walking a little apart, though ostensibly belonging to Lady Barbara's party—"I hope that you will allow me the honour of dancing the first waltz with you this evening."

"With great pleasure," she replied; "you are determined not to be forestalled, Mr. Lennox."

"With such a prize in view," replied he, "I may be excused, perhaps, for being rather impatient. May I also have the

pleasure of dancing the first quadrille with you ?”

“Nay, not both, Mr. Lennox. Whichever you please—but I cannot permit you to have both. If you think the prize really so valuable as you say, you ought not to wish to deprive others of all share in it.”

“Perhaps not,” said Lennox, “if I was an angel ; but being a mere mortal, I must plead guilty to being excessively selfish on the subject, and thinking of no one’s claims in comparison with my own.”

“What a beautiful butterfly !” suddenly exclaimed Louisa ; “see how he wings his way from flower to flower, sipping the sweets of each, and yet none have power to detain him. I fear me, that is too often the case with you gentlemen. You fly from one flower to another, devoting yourself assiduously to one for a short time, and then relinquishing it for another, and casting no thought on the poor flower thus left behind and rifled of its sweets.”

"But have you never heard that there is a flower which has the power of detaining the wandering insect, and keeping it a close prisoner, even if it perish in the embrace?"

"No; what do you mean?"

"There is a plant called the sensitive plant, or sometimes, in common parlance, 'Venus' fly-trap;' on the petals of which, if an insect settles, they immediately close upon it and completely shut it in. In like manner, the gay and gaudy tribe to whom you allude, though they may flutter uninjured for a time, may at last meet with those attractions, from whose influence there is no escape."

He said this in a marked manner, that brought the roses to Louisa's cheek; and by way of changing the conversation, she asked him if he was fond of boating?

"Yes, very fond indeed," he replied; "and my vanity whispers that I am no bad hand at managing a sailing-boat. If the sailing party comes off to-morrow, I hope

you will allow me to accompany you, and take the helm of the boat which will bear so precious a freight."

"I won't promise," replied Louisa; "I shall see how you behave."

Their conversation was here interrupted by their being joined by some of the rest of the party; and no other opportunity offered for private conversation during the remainder of the afternoon, the latter portion of which was spent by Louisa in her own apartment, recruiting her strength to be in readiness for the fatigues of the evening.

When she entered the drawing-room a few minutes before dinner, Lennox, who was there before her, stepped up to her and asked her, before she sat down, to look at some music that he had been looking over for her. She accordingly went with him to the piano, when, in turning over the leaves of a music book, he took a piece of loose paper, and presenting it to her, said—

"You remember our conversation the afternoon about the butterfly? I have embodied the idea in a few little verses, which I hope, you will accept from me in memory of the happy hours that I have spent in your society."

Louisa started, and felt rather afraid that by accepting his poetry she was doing something wrong. Curiosity, however, prevailed, and with a trembling hand she took the paper that he tendered to her, and while she professed to be looking over the music, she in reality employed herself in reading the following lines:

One day I was watching a butterfly bright,  
As from flower to flower he flew;  
He settled one instant, and then took his flight,  
Having sipped the honey dew.

Roam on, roam on, thou butterfly gay—  
Roam on so joyous and free!  
Roam on, nor dream that there may come a day  
When thou'lt lose thy liberty.

Scarcely formed was the thought to one flow'ret he flew  
Blest by heaven with the pow'r of detaining;  
Around his gay wings her soft petals she threw,  
And left him no choice but remaining.

No more, no more, thou butterfly bright,  
From flower to flower shalt thou roam ;  
From thy lovely enslaver no more take thy flight,  
But make her fond bosom thy home !

Louisa blushed deeply as she read the last line ; feeling, however, that it was necessary to say something, she remarked,

“ Very pretty, indeed, Mr. Lennox ; you do not seem, however, to view the fate of the butterfly with great commiseration.

“ His fate would scarcely deserve any, Miss Castleton, even if he perished. Such a death could have nothing dreadful in it ! Far better to die thus, than to live for ever banished from the sweet object of his attentions.”

“ Nay, now, you are talking nonsense, Mr. Lennox ; but in the meantime, what am I to do with the verses ?”

“ I will take charge of them for you till to-morrow, if you will promise me that you will accept them.”

“ Well, I promise,” she replied ; and then their conversation was interrupted.

Their dinner passed off more silently than their dinners usually did, for Louisa felt somewhat confused by the very marked tone which Lennox's conversations with her had now assumed. She could not but feel that, without making a positive declaration, he was perpetually giving her to understand that he viewed her in a very different light from any one else ; and she did not feel sure how far she was justified in encouraging him in doing so. In her own heart she believed that he loved her truly and devotedly ; but she did not know how far the opinion of the world would go with her, and how far such a decided affair as hers had now become, could be carried on without any injury accruing from it to her character.

Anxieties such as these, made her serious and pre-occupied ; and Lennox, who perceived the difference in her manner, made a guess at the cause, which was not very far from the truth.

Very soon after dinner, the carriages



came round, and they started for the ball, Lennox accompanying Lady Barbara and her two young ladies, as Sir William Pleydell voted the whole thing a bore, and declared his intention of remaining at home. Of course, as they were four inside a coach, there was not much opportunity for private conversation ; and though Lennox exerted himself very much to entertain the company in general, he was inwardly delighted when they drew up at the door of the town-hall of W—— ; in the large room over which, the musical festival balls had for time out of mind been held. Then his heart beat high with anticipated pleasure, and he fervently hoped that the ball might have begun, so that the first "stupid" quadrille might be over, and he might be able at once to enjoy the long looked-for pleasure of waltzing with Louisa. His wish was gratified. The first quadrille was just finished, and, even as they entered the room, the inspiring strains of the Olga waltz were resounding through

it. Lennox did not waste any of the precious moments, but, with a smile at Lady Barbara, as much as to say, "now I relieve you for some time of your fair charge," he slipped his arm round Louisa's waist, and rapidly whirling away, was soon lost to sight among the herd of dancers who already crowded the room. Lennox was a first-rate dancer; his good ear and natural grace were aided by the experience which a few London seasons had afforded him, and which enabled him to thread his way amongst the throng with an ease that one less practised in the art of dancing in a crowd could never have attained. Louisa had, in that particular, inherited the talents of her mother, who had, in her day, been considered one of the most accomplished dancers that the metropolis afforded. She had, necessarily, very little practice; but her natural aptitude, and the inherent grace of her movements, supplied the place of experience; and, under Lennox's skilful guidance, they

threaded the crowded circle in a manner that, while it afforded the most unbounded delight to themselves, called forth the unqualified admiration of the bystanders, amongst whom many an inquiry was made as to who the *distingué* looking couple could be, for Lennox was an entire stranger in the county ; and Louisa having never been "out" even in the country, was known to few beside her immediate neighbours.

There was one, however, who did not need that any one should tell him to whom that lovely face, that sylph-like form belonged. Wentworth had, after many an inward struggle, and many a conversation on the subject with Mr. Castleton, determined to come to the ball, and see and judge for himself how it fared with the idol of his heart, amongst the gay circle by which she was surrounded. He could bear the suspense no longer. He had heard nothing from Susan ; and he, therefore, felt convinced that no unworthy

claimant was aspiring to her hand; but Susan had expressly told him that she should not consider herself bound to write, if any attachment appeared to be growing up on the part of any one who would be likely to ask for her hand in an open and honourable manner. Louisa's own letters to her father had been two in number—one written on the first day of the festival, after her return from W——, in which she had principally dilated on the glories of the "Messiah," and had merely mentioned that she had had a very agreeable dinner on the previous evening, having sat next to a Mr. Lennox, who had succeeded very well in amusing her; the other, written the day previous, after her second visit to W——, in which she had said little about the oratorio, except that she had thought the "Creation" very inferior to the "Messiah," but had given a long account of her rambles of the preceding day, in which the name of Lennox had necessarily figured in almost every other line.

Mr. Castleton, who, in pity to the lover's anxiety, had read most of Louisa's letters to him, had no difficulty in informing him that this Mr. Lennox was the eldest son of Lord Lennox, not very rich, but probably absolutely precluded by poverty from marrying. This intelligence worked poor Matworth's suspense and anxiety to a pitch that was absolutely intolerable, and he asked Mr. Castleton if he thought there was really any harm in his going to the

Mr. Castleton said that he did not generally approve of members of the clergy making a practice of mingling in gay scenes, where idleness was so common and trifling so predominant, but that, on a single occasion, and with such a special object in view, he did not conceive there could be any harm in it; and satisfied thus by his rector's opinion, Matworth stifled any lingering scruples, and started for W——; determined to see for himself, as far as he possibly could, of the demeanour of his beloved,

and of the probable intentions of this Mr. Lennox. He had arrived early and was standing near the door, anxiously expecting the arrival of the Stapleford party, when Louisa and Lennox entered. Her dress almost touched him, but she was looking up at Lennox and did not see him. He, however, saw the look which Lennox bent upon her ; he saw the smile which Lennox gave to Lady Barbara, as he dashed off with her lovely niece ; he saw the intelligent look with which Lady Barbara replied to the smile, and his heart sank within him. It was plain, Lennox (for his heart told him it was he) was avowedly paying his court to Louisa, and Lady Barbara saw it, and approved.

So absorbed had he been in his observation of Louisa, that he was not conscious of the presence of Lady Barbara's other companion. He did not see that pale face flush, when his unexpected appearance sent the blood coursing through its veins. He did not see the still deeper pallor that

overspread it, on its remaining so utterly unnoticed. By the time that he observed Susan, she had had time to recover her composure ; and frankly holding out her hand to him, she said, in a tone from which she succeeded in banishing every trace of emotion—

“ We did not expect to see you here, Mr. Wentworth. I must introduce you to Lady Barbara. Lady Barbara, you must let me introduce Mr. Wentworth, a great friend of Mr. Castleton’s.”

Lady Barbara shook hands with him, saying, she had often heard of him, and was very glad to make his acquaintance ; but thinking inwardly to herself that she feared he had come to spoil the affair between her niece and Mr. Lennox, in which she had already taken a great interest, and therefore rather wishing that he had stayed away.

Wentworth, as in duty bound, commenced a conversation with her, but he was all the time revolving in his mind how best he could get a little private talk

with Susan. He did not waltz, and therefore could not ask her to dance now, and the next quadrille he ardently hoped to be allowed to dance with Louisa. He therefore made up his mind that he could not dance with Susan for the present, and that he would stay and talk to her and Lady Barbara, until the end of the waltz should bring Louisa back to her party.

How brief does a waltz appear, when we are dreading its termination—how wearily long, when we are ardently desiring it. No two people would have given so different an account of an interval of time, as Lennox and Wentworth of the duration of the waltz in question. The former was ready to declare that it could not have lasted more than five minutes, while the latter was willing to make an affidavit that it did not occupy less than five and twenty ! An unprejudiced observer would have fixed its length with tolerable correctness at a quarter of an hour, “ be the same more or less.” However, it came to an end at



length, and at that early period of the evening there was no pretext for going to supper, nor indeed was there any supper to go to. Lennox slowly and reluctantly conducted Louisa back towards Lady Barbara, having first extracted a promise that she would dance with him the next polka but one, and another waltz later in the evening. Louisa was even more surprised than Susan at seeing Wentworth, for she did not know, as Susan did, the weighty reasons that prompted him to be present.

To her enquiries, he replied, what was doubtless true, that he had come principally for the pleasure of seeing her, and hearing how she was going on, and how she had been amusing herself. He added that he hoped he might be allowed the pleasure of dancing the next quadrille with her.

“Oh, no! Mr. Wentworth, not the next! I am really very sorry, but I have been engaged for a long time to dance the next quadrille with Lord Augustus. However this next is going to be a polka, and that

I am engaged to dance with Mr. Thornton."

"May I then have the quadrille after the next?"

"With great pleasure, but you know there will be another waltz and polka before that, so that I am afraid it will be a long time before it comes."

"I am afraid so indeed," sighed Wentworth; and he thought that, if it were so long before he got his dance with Louisa—that with Susan, for which he was hardly less anxious, would be indefinitely put off, for she too was engaged for the next quadrille to her friend Mr. Grote, who had taken a decided fancy to her, inasmuch as she allowed him to talk about music to her for hours together, without appearing to be bored, or cutting short the thread of his harangue.

The band now commenced a polka, and Thornton making his appearance, carried off Louisa to mix once more in the mazy crowd.

At this moment Susan's attention was

acted by two ladies, who were making way towards her through the crowd, in whom she had no difficulty in recognising her mother and sister.

Mrs. Vernon and Isabella soon made way up to the party, to all of whom they were known; for Lady Barbara and Lord Rox had made their acquaintance in the country, and Wentworth had seen them occasionally, though not often, in the country. Vernon addressed Lady Barbara affectionately, for she was eager to impress the idea that she was on intimate terms with one of the great ladies of the county; Isabella cast an insinuating glance upon Lord Rox, for was he not a peer's eldest son? He shook hands carelessly with Susan, bowed distantly to Wentworth; and having so done, returned to their respective points of attention.

Isabella Vernon was what is sometimes called a "candlelight beauty," that is, her beauty which in the light of day appeared pale and opaque, in the artificial glare of

wax lights assumed a clear and fair complexion. Her eyes were large and lustrous; in fact, they were the best features in her face, and she well knew how to make use of them. Her hair was dark, thick and remarkably well dressed; her eyebrows also were dark and well marked, though some there were who doubted whether their colour and regularity were entirely owing to nature. Her figure was not bad; and although she did not possess the taper waist of Louisa Castleton, still by dint of a good dress-maker it presented a very creditable appearance. Such as she was, her friends called her a beauty; her enemies, and she had many, "could not conceive what there was to admire" in Isabella Vernon; while amongst the knot of young men who knew her, danced with her, and cared not one straw about her, she had obtained the *soubriquet* that has been mentioned above of the "candlelight beauty." It was not to her beauty, however, that she owed the influence that over many people

she undoubtedly possessed. She was endowed with great powers of mind, and was well read in many things which do not usually fall within the routine of a woman's pursuits. In fact, she was possessed of a very well cultivated mind, and was far more talented than most of the young men her partners. But she was not only talented and well cultivated—she was calculating, and, above all, utterly passionless and cold-hearted. Her well-laid plans were never for an instant interfered with by any influence that her passions or affections could assert. If she thought that the conquest of any youth could either lead to her ultimate settlement, or contribute to her present amusement, she set about it systematically, heedless of the present anguish she might be causing to others, or of the future pain she was laying up in store for him. If, when she had brought him to her feet, a new object of greater pretensions presented himself, no feeling of regret for the hours she had passed, perhaps so happily,

in his society would deter her from casting him off in favour of his more deserving rival—if, indeed, such a decided course were necessary; for, if not attended with the absolute danger of losing both, she would very much prefer retaining them both in her chains. If she had one passion, if her actions ever were regulated by aught save the calculations of self-interest, it was in this way. Whenever she saw a young man worshipping at the shrine of any other divinity, she immediately felt an ardent desire to wean him from his allegiance, and draw him to herself: and this even, when she would have scorned to marry him, if he had asked her.

Such was Isabella Vernon. In her previous intercourse with Lennox, she had at one time decidedly “set her cap” at him. He was not rich, she knew, but he would be a peer, and her own fortune would be ample enough, added to his, to secure them from the pinchings of poverty. At last, however, a rival, with an equally

eligible coronet, and much more eligible fortune, came into the field, and Lennox felt that he was rather discarded, though Isabella had managed so cleverly as not quite to break with him, while she encouraged his rival ; an act of discretion, on which she afterwards heartily congratulated herself, for the new-comer proved refractory, and in time married some one else, so that she was highly delighted at having Lennox to fall back upon.

She had not expected to meet him at this ball ; but when she did so (knowing nothing of his recently conceived *penchant* for Louisa) she imagined that he, a London man, would be delighted at thus meeting her, a London young lady—that he would, in fact, devote himself to her, and that she should have a splendid opportunity for recovering the ground she had so lately lost, in her endeavours to catch his more wealthy compeer. It was this expectation that made her eyes sparkle and her cheeks glow with an unwonted colour, as she talked to

Lennox, expecting every moment that he would ask her to dance ; and when he did so, though she was rather surprised at his naming a quadrille instead of a waltz, she imagined that it was only because he was possibly engaged for the next waltz ; and the quadrille being the very next dance, his impatience had urged him to demand that. Her astonishment therefore was great, when, instead of continuing his conversation with her, he broke off abruptly, and turned to talk to a lovely girl, who had just stopped to rest in the course of the polka, at no great distance from where they were standing.

“ Is it possible that is Miss Castleton ? ” said Mrs. Vernon, continuing her conversation with Lady Barbara. “ I should not have known her—how wonderfully she is improved ! I have not seen her for some little time, but the alteration is quite astonishing, is not it, Isabella ? ”

“ I always thought Miss Castleton very handsome, ” replied her daughter, thinking



to herself all the time "what can Mr. Lennox find to admire in that childish, unmeaning face?"

There was another, who was watching the colloquy between Lennox and Louisa, and who thought that face neither childish nor unmeaning; and Wentworth's eye gazed anxiously at the pair, and he would have given worlds to have read the state of their several hearts; and Susan, whose last words had fallen unheeded on his ear, sighed bitterly, as she marked his anxious glance, and thought how her eye would sparkle, and how her cheek would brighten, if he would turn upon her such looks as Lennox was even now bending upon the happy Louisa.

The polka now soon came to an end, and Louisa was led back by Thornton to her *chaperone*. Lennox still continued to converse with her, and it was not until the first notes of the quadrille had sounded that he turned from her, and offered his arm to Isabella, saying, as he did so—

" We need not hurry—I have got a *vis-a-vis*."

Isabella did not need being told what the *vis-a-vis* was ; and her indignation and mortification were unbounded, when she found how absent and abstracted Lennox was when he addressed her, and how eagerly he snatched at every opportunity of exchanging a nod, a look, or a sign with his lovely *vis-a-vis*. She fancied, moreover, that Lord Augustus, who was Louisa's partner, and her own *vis-a-vis*, both saw and enjoyed her discomfiture. Her feelings, therefore, when she was taken back to her mother, were of no amiable or placid description ; and she vowed within herself, that, come what might, she would manage, by hook or crook, to spoil the triumph of that beautiful girl, and teach her not to put herself in rivalry with her—forgetting very innocent poor Louisa was of no rivalry, as she did not even know Lennox and Isabella were so much acquainted with one another.

Greatly to her delight, Lord Augustus now asked her to dance the forthcoming waltz with him. From him she gathered all the particulars of the affair between Lennox and Louisa, and determined to play her cards accordingly.

Lennox danced this waltz with Susan, whom he had learnt really to like from the good character that Louisa had given of her, and Louisa herself dancing with some one else, Wentworth was left once more to his own meditations. That these were not of the most satisfactory character may easily be imagined. One consolation however he had, Louisa was not dancing with Lennox, but with some one who was evidently indifferent to her ; and he could let his eyes dwell upon her lovely form, as it whirled by him in the dance, without having to endure the pangs of jealousy at seeing her evident interest in all his rival did or said. With the dance, however, this satisfaction was withdrawn from him—for the ensuing polka

was the one to which Lennox had been looking forward with such eagerness. Once again he passed his arm around that slender waist—once more he pressed that glowing form to his bosom—once more he clasped—ah, how much more tightly would he have liked to have clasped it!—that lovely hand, and once more did they wind their way through the crowded dance, the envy of one half of the room, and the admiration of the other.

The sight was wormwood to Wentworth. He bore it, however, manfully, thinking that his long-promised quadrille was coming next, and that then, at least, he should have an opportunity of speaking to her, even if he should derive no consolatory assurance from doing so.

The polka, however, seemed interminable, longer even than the waltz which had tried his patience so severely at an earlier period of the evening: at last the music ceased—but only for a second, when it struck up afresh with a galop.

This, according to custom, was considered as part of the same dance, and again Wentworth had to wait while his happier rival danced triumphantly past him as if exulting in his own good fortune. But this, too, came to an end at last; and then Wentworth expected that Louisa would be surrendered up to Lady Barbara. But, no! the supper-rooms were now opened, and after the fatigue of the dance a little refreshment was absolutely necessary for Louisa. To supper accordingly they went, and Wentworth once more lost sight of the idol of his heart. Soon, however, the sets began to be formed for the next quadrille, couple after couple came out of the supper-room, and every moment Wentworth expected that she would make her appearance, and held himself in readiness at once to take charge of her—but still she came not. He had engaged Susan to be his *vis-a-vis*. She was going to dance with Lord Augustus, who, finding that Wentworth had

not yet got his partner, urged him to go into the supper-rooms and look for her, as the quadrille was on the point of beginning. Thus urged on, Wentworth entered the supper-room. It was nearly empty—almost all the dancers had returned to the ball-room to take their places in the quadrille. At the further end, however, he instantly distinguished the object of his search. She was dallying with an ice that she held in her hand, and professed to be eating, while in reality she was listening to the words that Lennox was pouring into her ear. Neither of them saw him—his heart almost failed him—he was more than half inclined to turn back and leave them undisturbed. He felt, however, that he could hardly do this without at once resigning all claim upon her—as it would necessarily appear, as if when the dance came on, for which she was engaged to him, he had not thought it worth his while to go and seek her. Mustering up his

ge, therefore, he stepped forward ; when he was close to her, said in a voice—

Miss Castleton, the quadrille you asked me is on the point of being—

Oh ! Mr. Wentworth,” said she, looking suddenly, “ pray let it be the next I have not had time to finish my ice,” added hesitatingly, as if she had been looking for a valid excuse.

Wentworth bowed, spoke not, but left room ; only as he turned at reaching door—they were looking at him, and Susan was laughing ! His heart now opened within him. He felt overcome by disappointment and despair. “ And so,” said he to himself, “ is the end of it—the object of my coming to this place has been frustrated, for I am engaged to dance the next quadrille with Susan Vernon ; the reward of my patient endurance has been taken from me—I have been made ridiculous in the eyes of others—and my

which would have been greatly trampled on, but she might enjoy another five minutes conversation with that butterfly and not care for it, but she actually took a second and a third laugh at my discomfort.

He reflected, however, that it was necessary that he should tell her that he was engaged for the next quadrille; but he determined not again to interrupt her, but to wait for an opportunity of speaking to her, if possible, when she was apart from him. This did not occur till after the conclusion of the quadrille, when Louisa went off to walk with some one else, and during one of the pauses in the dance, Westworth went up to her, and told her, that he was very sorry that the arrangement she had proposed could not be carried out, as he had previously been engaged to dance with Miss Vernon.

"Oh, very well," said she; "I am very sorry—and you must tell Susan to make herself particularly agreeable to make up for me."



saying, she yielded to the request of partner, who not approving that any part of his fair partner's time that really belonged to him should be appropriated by any one else, urged her to "take another turn," and she whirled leaving Wentworth planted where he stood, the picture of mute despair.

"How changed she is!" thought he to himself; "she who used to be so conscious that she could not so much as hurt the feelings of her worst enemy, she had had an enemy, which, God knows, she had not—she now inflicts the grievous wounds on a heart that never truly, without the slightest compunction—and in how short a time has so much change been effected. It is but four years since I watched her depart from her father's house, when she was—all that she has been—until now. It is but five years since I had that long conversation with Miss Vernon, in which I laid bare to my heart's dearest hopes, little think-

thing I have now to look  
the present, is my quadi  
when I will learn more fu  
riculars of this evident at  
then I will take my leave  
• ~~quadi~~ so ill-suited to m  
and ~~take~~ back my broken  
needless name. But how I  
the bridge my home' He  
able to endure the sight  
so well, and who now is  
another—or if she marrie  
parts from those scenes, he  
to look upon the spots,  
been together, where I ha  
her, and have, ah, too fond  
she might one day be brou  
vourably on me!—how lon  
the society of her good, he

ress, if she has set her heart upon being so by being united to this young of nobility?—oh! Louisa, Louisa, if didst but know the agony thou art needlessly causing to one who loves so well, wouldst not thou pause in thy thoughtless career.”

these and similar bitter reflections passed the time, until the termination of that waltz, and the ensuing polka led him that it was time to seek Susan. It may easily be supposed that had on her part been awaiting this trille with an ardour fully equal to with which Wentworth had looked forward to his with Louisa.

he had been much disappointed at his going to be her *vis-a-vis*, although she was that it would have cost her something to have seen him dancing with Louisa; but when he did not appear after having been to seek his partner, she understood the cause, knowing that Louisa had been dancing the previous dance with

Lennox, and that she might therefore wish very possibly for a longer space than the period between two dances, for going to supper with him. She did not, therefore, address any question on the subject to him, but proceeded in silence to take their place in the quadrille. He, however, began the conversation by touching on the subject :—

“ I was sorry I could not fulfil my engagement of being your *vis-a-vis* in the last quadrille, Miss Vernon, but I was, as you know, engaged to Miss Castleton, and she—” here he hesitated an instant— “ she in fact threw me overboard ”

“ Perhaps she had made some mistake. She has so many engagements, it is quite possible.”

“ No, no, there was no mistake. She did not attempt to deny that she was engaged to me, but she begged me to put it off till the next. The next being this one, I was already engaged to you, and so I suppose I shall, after all, leave the room

without having danced with, almost without having spoken to, Miss Castleton."

"Indeed I am sorry, Mr. Wentworth, that you should have allowed your engagement to me to stand in the way of your dancing with Louisa ;—knowing, as I do, the nature of your feelings towards her, I should not have been at all affronted, I assure you."

And Susan smiled—but it was a sickly, ghastly smile ; such a smile as we give when we are forced to smile while suffering under severe bodily or mental anguish.

"Nay, Miss Vernon, I could not for the world have treated you so—and besides, I have *some* pride, and I really was not sorry that I was so situated as to be prevented from deferring to her caprice ! But now tell me," said he in a cooler tone, "how all this has been brought about. It seems so sudden. It is but four days since you took leave of us at Shelbridge."

"It is sudden, no doubt," replied Susan,

“and I can hardly explain to you how the affair has assumed the aspect that you now behold. The first day that they sat together at dinner, Louisa certainly said she found him agreeable ; but she did not seem so decidedly under his influence. But since that, he has appeared to exercise a charm over her. I know it must be painful to you, Mr. Wentworth, but I cannot conceal the fact—and indeed it must be evident to yourself—that just at present he does exercise a wonderful influence over her. You have one of two courses open to you ; either at once to give her up, and seek for some other, who might more willingly reciprocate your passion—or to enter the lists boldly, and endeavour to undo the work that he has done, and establish your own influence in the place of his.”

“But that is impossible, Miss Vernon,” replied he. “You know I cannot declare myself openly, and if I could, I fear it is already too late—and I must submit to

seeing the idol of my heart become the bride of another. But even that cannot alter my feelings for her, and come weal, come woe, my heart is hers and hers only for ever."

These words sank in poor Susan's ears like a knell. Would nothing then wean him from his mad and hopeless passion, and bring him to her side, who would welcome him so gladly? She sighed deeply, and it was with a heavy heart that at the close of the quadrille she made her bow to Wentworth, who immediately left the room, and striding down stairs, quitted the ball without having once danced with Louisa Castleton.

Susan was now left with her mother, Lady Barbara having gone to have some supper, and she soon found that Mr. Lennox was the subject of a conversation between her mother and her sister.

"Well, mamma, have you asked him?" said Isabella.

"Yes, my dear, and he has promised to come."

"That's all right, and now we will see if I cannot wean him from the memory of that baby-faced girl."

In answer to Susan's enquiries, she was told that Mr. Lennox had just been asked by her mother to come and stay at her house a few weeks hence, when an archery meeting in the neighbourhood would give occasion to the assembling of a large party.

Of the remainder of that eventful ball, little need be narrated. That Louisa danced again, and more than once, with Lennox, may well be imagined—as also that while they returned with gay and happy hearts to Stapleford Castle, it was with heaviness in her heart, and melancholy in her soul, that Susan courted sleep—while her sister sought her pillow with her mind filled with thoughts of present mortifications and anticipations of future revenge.



## CHAPTER VII.

On the following morning the breakfast at Stapleford Castle, as is often the case after a ball, was but a desultory meal. People dropping in now and then as they found courage to quit their beds—and then, having satisfied their appetites, dropping out again, and rejoining the rest of the party in the library, in the drawing-room, or on the lawn.

Susan and Louisa were amongst those, who chose the latter place of *rendezvous*, and sauntering together arm in arm they crossed in front of the drawing-room window more than once, appearing so deep in conversation that even Lennox did not

think fit to interrupt their *tête-a-tête*, but remained for some time standing at the window, watching his opportunity, and gazing upon the light and graceful form of Louisa, as it moved up and down the well-shaven turf before the house.

Their conversation was indeed interesting, at least to themselves—for the theme was the ball of the previous evening, which had been productive of more excitement to Louisa than is usually the case even with the first ball of a young and beautiful *débutante*.

Susan was anxious to speak to her about Wentworth. She was half angry with her for having wounded his feelings so much, while, at the same time, she could hardly bring herself to feel otherwise than glad that she had done so. She felt, however, that to cause any one to experience pain, humiliation, or annoyance was so unlike Louisa's character, that she was curious to hear the reasons that she could adduce for having done so in this instance, while she

more than half suspected that Wentworth's passion had made him over-sensitive, and that a more indifferent person would have been far less severely wounded.

It was always rather difficult for Susan to mention Wentworth's name to Louisa. She was so keenly alive to the difference of their positions with respect to him, that any thing like an approach to the topic was disagreeable to her. For whenever they were speaking of him, she was conscious of blindly worshipping one who equally devotedly worshipped Louisa. She felt therefore most painfully humiliated, whenever the comparison between them on this point suggested itself, and therefore naturally avoided the subject as much as possible.

On this occasion, however, she was too much interested to maintain her accustomed reserve. She said therefore —

“ I wish, dear Louisa, that your feelings of enjoyment of yesterday evening had been shared by all who were there—but there

was one, who, I fear, left the ball very much out of conceit with it, and on your account too."

"On my account, dear Susan, what can you mean? I did not know that I had hurt anybody's feelings; who can you mean that went away dissatisfied on my account?"

"No less a person than your old friend Mr. Wentworth, who told me a terrible tale of the way in which you had slighted and thrown him over."

"Oh! but he could only have been joking, he must have known very well that he is the very last person in the world whom I could think intentionally of slighting."

"I assure you, that, when he was speaking to me about it, he was not the least in joke. He said he had been engaged to dance with you, and that you had refused to fulfil your engagement, although he went up and claimed you, and you were evidently not engaged to dance with any one else."

“ Yes, I remember, I will tell you all about it. I had just been dancing with Mr. Lennox,” and here a faint blush tinged the fair speaker’s cheek,—“ I had just been dancing with Mr. Lennox, and we had gone into the supper-room, and we were just having a nice little chat, and we had not been there five minutes before Mr. Wentworth came and claimed his dance. I only asked him to put it off to dance the next quadrille instead of that one, for I thought it could not signify to him which it was ; and I did not know, he did not say till afterwards, that he was engaged for that next one ; and I did not think it would very much signify to him, who can see me every day, and all day long, at Shelbridge, whether I danced one quadrille with him, or not, at a public ball. But was he really offended ? I am so very sorry.” And her manner showed that she was really so very penitent for the pain she had unwittingly caused, though she was so very far from suspecting the extent

of that pain, that Susan could not help rejoicing that Wentworth did not see her at that moment, though she instantly reproached herself with having rejoiced at his being deprived of what she knew would have been so great a pleasure to him.

Poor Susan's heart was indeed well-nigh distracted. The natural impulse of her own feelings, of course, led her to desire that the breach between Louisa and Wentworth should be as wide and as impassable as possible. She hardly knew whether she had any hopes of herself winning his affections. At times she thought that were they disengaged, it was possible that he might bestow them on her: at times she felt as if it was entirely out of the question that he could ever look upon her with love. But she had once thought that ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> did, and, though she had been cruelly ~~dis~~ <sup>dis</sup>appointed, she could not entirely persuade herself that it was utterly impossible th ~~at~~ <sup>at</sup> he ever should. Hope is one of the strongest passions in the human breast, and

until he were dead or actually married to another, she clung to the hope that he might one day be hers. At any rate, however, he could never be so, until he was cured of the unhappy passion that he felt for Louisa, who was evidently so far from returning it. Whether Louisa would ever have returned it, or not, had circumstances remained as they were, Susan could not tell; but she was now so entirely taken up with Lennox, that any idea of her reciprocating Wentworth's affection was evidently out of the question. Susan had done her best to discover something about Mr. Lennox. She had heard nothing of him that was not satisfactory. She therefore ardently wished that the affair might prosper and come to a speedy conclusion, as she thought that the sooner Wentworth was convinced that his passion for Louisa was fruitless, the sooner would he become reconciled to his disappointment, and that then his heart might perhaps open towards one, who would so willingly accept it, al-

though the first bloom of its affections had been already brushed off by another.

It may be said that, in this case, Susan judged Wentworth differently from herself. She felt that her own attachment to him could never be shaken—that she could never love another, and yet she was building her hopes on the probability of his speedily forgetting the object of his present pursuit, when it should be no longer within his reach. But in this she was but like the rest of our race—we are all apt to form our judgments according to our wishes, and in the words of the great poet-moralist,

“What ardently we wish we soon believe.”

Besides, she had a great idea of the superior constancy of woman's attachment over that of man; and, while she maintained that nothing could shake her own, she thought it very reasonable that time and a conviction of the futility of his pursuit, might work a change in Wentworth's.



In fact, from one cause or another, she did entertain hopes—vague certainly, but still they were hopes—of one day winning Wentworth's affection ; and as a means thereto, Louisa's rejection of his suit—her acceptance of that of Lennox—and Wentworth's consequent conviction of the hopelessness of his own passion, were all events very much to be desired. But still, when she thought of the pain and suffering to which he would be exposed, during the trying ordeal—pain and suffering that she could so well appreciate—she dreaded it for him ; and she felt as if, to ensure his peace, she would willingly have sacrificed her own — that she would even take pleasure in seeing him happy in the arms of another, provided it could be so—but it could *not*—it was not in her power to make Louisa love him, if she had wished it ever so much ; and as then she could not make him happy in his own way, she could not avoid wishing for the concurrence of circumstances that might enable

her to make him so in hers. From all these causes, however, her mind was in a state of distraction. She knew not what to wish, what to hope, what thoughts she might cherish, and what she must condemn as selfish, if not criminal.

They had both now been silent for some minutes ; for thoughts such as these had been chasing one another through poor Susan's brain, while Louisa was still thinking with regret of the pain which she had unintentionally given to Wentworth on the preceding evening. Lennox, however, observing that their animated discussion had apparently come to an end, now joined them, and the trio walked up and down for some time, rather to Susan's annoyance ; who felt herself *de trop*, and yet did not know how to leave them. To her great relief, they soon encountered another party, consisting of Mrs. Macdonald, Thornton, and Lady Barbara.

"I was just looking for you, young ladies," said the latter. "You were want-

ing to sail yesterday, I have had the boats put in order, and there is just a nice breeze for sailing, so if you like it, we may go at once."

The proposal meeting with general favour, the whole party proceeded down to the border of the lake, when they found the boats lying at anchor, and looking very tempting.

They were preparing to get into one of them, when Mrs. Macdonald said,

"Can't we go in both the boats? It would be such much better fun, we should go so much faster, and then we could race, you know, and have all kinds of amusement."

"We have only got two gentlemen," said Lady Barbara, doubtfully, "and I really don't know whether one man could manage the boat by himself."

"As far as I am concerned," said Lennox, anxious by any means to get rid of the chattering Mrs. Macdonald, "I am sure I can manage the boat very well. I

am used to this kind of thing; and, if Thornton can say as much for himself, we can manage to please Mrs. Macdonald without any difficulty."

"Oh yes!" said Thornton, determined not to be outdone by Lennox; "I can manage perfectly well by myself."

"Very well then," said Lady Barbara, "so be it then. You and Mrs. Macdonald may take the other boat, and we will go in this one."

"But you will come with us, Miss Vernon, won't you?" said Mrs. Macdonald. "We ought to be an equal number in each boat, or the race will not be a fair one."

In fact, Mrs. Macdonald was rather anxious for Susan's company, as a kind of *chaperone*, for Thornton had been so very particular in his attentions to her of late, that she really did not know how far he might not go, if he had her all to himself in a boat in the middle of the lake; and though his attentions both amused and pleased her, she dreaded his carrying

them too far, for she hated a scene, and moreover did not care a brass button about the young man in question, though she accepted, nay encouraged, his evident devotion to herself.

Susan, being thus called upon, could not refuse, though she would much have preferred remaining in the other boat with Louisa and Lady Barbara. The ladies now took their places, and the gentlemen standing up, shoved off from the shore with the boat-hooks. Lennox then set the sails, consisting only of a fore-sail and large main-sail, and taking his seat between the two ladies, he took the rudder strings in his hands, and the little vessel, heeling over gently to the breeze, stood gallantly out towards the opposite shore.

They looked round from time to time to see if their companions were following them. There appeared to be a little delay in starting, but after a short space, the other boat seemed to follow in their wake, though without lessening the distance between them.

“There does not seem to be any very great difficulty in managing a boat, Mr. Lennox,” observed Louisa, after Lennox had been for some time sitting by her side, talking to her, and apparently taking no further trouble with the boat, than just to give an occasional twitch to the tiller-rope.

“Not in such weather as this, Miss Castleton, nor holding such a course as we are. There is just wind sufficient to take us along fast enough, without its being so fresh as to threaten us with a capsize ; and then it is just a beam, or what is called a side wind, so that it fills our sails, and takes us along without the trouble of tacking. I can fancy, however, a squall arising, even on this lake, which, in such a cockle-shell as this, might call for the exercise of no little seamanship. But suppose we change our course and sail down the lake, it seems to extend a good way in that direction.”

“Very well ; but let us wait for the others,” said Lady Barbara, “and have

that race that Mrs. Macdonald is so anxious for. There is a little island with a heap of stones upon it near the lower end—we might sail round that and back again to the boat-house.”

“Yes,” said Lennox, “that would be capital. We should have the wind dead against us coming back, so we should try the qualities of the boats, and the skill of the commanders not a little. We will lie to and wait for them.”

So saying, he pulled the rudder, and brought the little vessel round till it lay with its head to wind, in which position it remained almost motionless, dancing over the tiny billows that rippled against its bows.

In a few minutes the other boat came within hail. Lennox shouted to Thornton and explained the conditions of the race. Thornton expressed his assent, and immediately turned the head of his boat down the lake, dashing along the prescribed course.

"That was hardly fair," said Lennox, as the head of his boat swung slowly round with the wind. "We waited for him, and now he has stolen a march upon us; but, I have no doubt, we shall be even with him in the end, or even if he beats us now with the wind aft, we are sure to have the best of it in beating up against the wind as we come back. In the meantime let us have rather a freer sheet."

So saying, he slackened the main-sheet; and the sail bellying out with the wind, which now began to freshen a little, they dashed through the water, the little vessel hurrying along as though she were pursued by an avenging fury.

There were some islands in the lake; and, in answer to Lennox, Lady Barbara told him that the shorter passage would lead him between two islands that she pointed out, but that it was narrow and intricate.

"Never mind," said Lennox, "with the wind like this, there cannot be the slightest danger." And sailing into the channel



Lady Barbara had pointed out, he had through it in perfect safety, having gained considerably upon their rivals, who taken a more circuitous though a course.

And now they could see the little islet formed the goal round which they to turn. They evidently gained upon theirs ; but with the wind as it then it was equally certain that they could hope to overtake them ere they reached island. In fact, just as they had it come up with them, Thornton put his helm and stood round, to pass to windward of the island. Lennox was not far after him ; and seeing that Thornton instead of tacking at once, was stretch-  
across the lake for some distance, he once brought his own vessel up to the stern and changing the tackle from one of the boat to the other, with a rapidity that half frightened Louisa, endeavored now to pass on the windward side of the island. There was not much room

to spare; the wind had been freshening during the whole voyage, though as they went with it they had not perceived it, and threatened to drive them on shore. However though they steered very close, they escaped the danger, and now began the task of beating up to windward.

They were now at some distance from the other boat, which had made a long stretch before tacking, in the hope, they supposed, of making a good deal of way on the next tack; though, in fact, Thornton, who was not by any means so *au fait* at the management of a vessel as Lennox, was rather afraid of tacking, as Lennox did, so close upon the island, and preferred having more sea-room for his manœuvres.

They did not, at any rate, see much of him for some time. And as they neared the islands which have been before mentioned, Lady Barbara asked Lennox if he intended attempting the narrow passage by which they had previously passed?

"Certainly not," replied Lennox. "It

would be impossible with this wind. There is a wider passage, I suppose, there on the left."

Lady Barbara assented ; and Lennox, though not without difficulty, steered his boat through the passage between the island and the shore, and then tacking, stretched across to windward of the cluster of islands towards the opposite coast. The furthest island projected into the water rather more than the others, and it seemed to be rather a question whether the boat would be able on that tack to pass to windward of it. The little vessel, however, held her wind gallantly, and they were just triumphantly passing the extreme point of the island, when, to their horror, they observed Thornton's boat close hauled on the other tack, and bearing down directly upon them.

Lennox was now really alarmed. It was impossible for him to go closer to the wind, and to fall off before it would be to run straight upon the steep rocky coast

of the island. There was one hope—it was not possible that Thornton might tack. It appeared as if he were trying to do so, but in his alarm and confusion he put his helm the wrong way. The wind took the sail aback, a momentary struggle ensued, and then, the boat capsizing, its dark inmates were suddenly immersed in the water. A scream arose simultaneously from both parties. Lennox endeavoured to lend some assistance; but the rapidity with which his boat was moving, carried her many yards from the scene of the accident, ere he could bring her up to the wind and arrest her course.

“Is the water deep?” was his hurried inquiry.

“Yes! oh yes!” replied Lady Barbara. “The back of the island goes sheer down in a precipitous wall of rock for many yards. It is the deepest part of the lake.”

“Susan! oh! poor, dear Susan!” sobbed Louisa.

Lennox did not delay any further. He

hastily dragged down the sail, so that no further mischief could arise, and then flinging off his coat, he plunged into the water. The wind and the current urged him to the spot. He beheld Thornton hanging on to the bough of a tree, and supporting Mrs. Macdonald, who was vainly struggling to find a footing, and in so doing was in constant danger of dragging Thornton from his fragile support.

"Where is Miss Vernon?" shouted Lennox.

"God only knows!" was the reply; but at the same instant part of a lady's dress caught his eye, floating still further down the stream.

Lennox was a good swimmer, and he now exerted himself to the utmost, and speedily attained the point where he had seen the dress appear. He sought for it, in the hope that it might again indicate the position of the object of his search; but no! nothing was now visible save the agitated surface of the water. He felt

sure, however, that he could not be far from the right place, and striking out boldly he dived to the bottom, in the hope that there he might see what, however, he feared would be but the corpse of his brother. Once he came up for breath, but at the second plunge he was more successful, and detected the body, which, but for him, had now sunk to rise no more. Seizing it by the hair, for the bonnet had come off in the struggle, he raised it to the surface, and then swimming with one hand urged it to the shore. The screams of the party had brought some labourers who were working in the fields to the spot. Lennox had just strength enough to urge his burden within reach of the men who were waiting to receive it; and then, worn out by his almost superhuman exertions, he himself sank beneath the waves, totally incapable of any further exertion. He was not, however, of course, destined to perish thus within reach of assistance; a man jumped in, pulled him

out, and laid him on the grass by Susan's side, the one apparently as lifeless as the other.

Louisa's sensations during this trying scene may be easier imagined than described. When she saw Lennox dive beneath the water, she thought that he too had gone down to rise no more, and her heart sank within her at the thought. When at last she saw him reappear with the body of Susan, and commence urging it towards the shore, her anxiety lest he should be unable to reach it was intense, and her regret at her own inability to render any assistance was excessive—for she could do nothing with the boat, which, with only its foresail set, was now drifting slowly down with the wind, and approaching by degrees the scene of the accident, though at too great a distance from the island to be of any assistance to Thornton and Mrs. Macdonald—who, though in no immediate danger, were sustaining a very unpleasant immersion, and, should the

though break by which Thornton was holding, might be placed in as dangerous a position as those who were but just rescued. If indeed they were rescued, from a watery grave. When, however, Lennox and Susan, being both on shore, had relieved Louisa's mind from a portion of its load, she bethought herself of the oars, which were lying in the boat, and having contrived to ship them, she and Lady Barbara began, though not very skilfully, to urge the boat towards the shore. The distance fortunately was not very great; and a man having run to meet them, they soon had the satisfaction of surrendering the boat into abler hands, and themselves stepping on terra firma. The man, jumping into the boat, pulled hastily across to the rescue of Thornton and Mrs. Macdonald, while Louisa moved eagerly and impetuously to the spot where Susan and Lennox were lying extended. The man assured her that they both lived, and a messenger having been despatched to the castle for :



carriage, there was nothing to be done but to await its arrival.

Oh, the long long weary minutes which Louisa spent, gazing on the apparently lifeless form of her whom she loved as a sister, and of him whom she loved—till that moment she hardly knew how dearly. She chafed Susan's feet in her hands, and directed one of the men to do the same to Lennox, but without effect; and it was with a despairing heart that when the carriage arrived, she saw the sufferers lifted into it. Mrs. Macdonald also was offered a seat, but she declared she should die of fright at being in the carriage with two corpses, as she termed them, and, all dripping as she was, she preferred to walk. Louisa accordingly herself got into the carriage, in which the old housekeeper from the castle had come down with a few cordials to restore, if possible, the circulation. Arrived at the castle, to Louisa's great joy she found that the doctor, who had been sent for, had been met just outside the park, and was already in attendance.

while Lennox was placed under the  
of the aforesaid old housekeeper,  
and anxiously did Louisa wait for  
friend, nor was her anxiety lessened  
suspense which tortured her as she  
passing in the room of the old  
At last she had the intense pleasure  
beholding Susan open her eyes, and  
faintly the hand that was pressed  
was long, however, before any  
factory intelligence was brought  
other apartment; and the old  
walked from one room to the other,  
his head, and said that the  
case was far worse than they  
though she had apparently  
water the longest, the strenuous  
excessive exertions that he had

At length, however, more favourable accounts were received, and before night closed in, the doctor announced that, though not absolutely out of danger, he thought the probabilities were that both his patients would go on well.

As it would, however, be at any rate sometime before either of the sufferers would be able to travel, Lady Barbara insisted on Louisa's writing to her father to beg to be allowed to prolong her stay at Stapleford Castle, in order to nurse Susan during her recovery—while the period of Lennox's stay was also necessarily extended. Louisa's conscience pricked her sorely when she reflected how differently she felt now at continuing her absence from home, from what she had felt when she had left it. Then, she was certain that she should be all anxiety to return again to her father ; now, she could not conceal that she was very glad to have so valid an excuse for prolonging her absence from him, and indulging herself yet more in the society of Lennox.

During the week that followed, she naturally saw more of him than ever. The rest of the company were gone. Susan and Lady Barbara were both well disposed to favour the intimacy: the opportunities, therefore, of their being together were numerous, and Lennox was not one to slight them. Still he did not make any formal proposal. He had sounded his father on the subject; but Lord Lennox had given him plainly to understand that Louisa's chance of being an heiress was still too problematical to warrant him in finally committing himself—for that unless she was destined to inherit her grandfather's vast property, the thing could not be. Lennox knew too well that it would be equally vain to combat his father's resolution as to fly in the face of it. He contented himself therefore with giving every proof of affection in his power short of actually committing himself; and he determined that next year, if Lord Abbotsham was still childless, he would again urge his father to consent to his wishes.

Susan was very much disappointed that nothing definite came of the affair—she now more than ever wished it to come off—for she felt herself bound to Lennox now by a debt of the deepest gratitude. He had saved her life at the imminent peril of his own, and she could never forget the obligation. To see him united to Louisa then was her dearest wish—and the sooner it was done the better would it be for poor Wentworth, for whom her heart bled when she thought of his sufferings. She, however, doubted not that there was some good reason for the delay of the proposal; and she thought that perhaps when Mr. Lennox was staying at Moor Park, as he was going to do very shortly, he would take the opportunity of riding over, and speaking to Mr. Castleton on the subject.

The time of separation came at last. Lennox returned to town—Susan to her mother, and Louisa went back to Shelbridge, with nothing more definite than the

following copy of verses in a well-known hand, which she had found in her music book on the morning of her departure—

Farewell ! how soon that word is spoken,  
That bids me from thy presence flee ;  
But not so soon the chain is broken,  
That binds my constant heart to thee.

To other scenes and other places,  
And friends beloved, I now depart ;  
But, though I gaze on loving faces,  
Thine image still will fill my heart.

I go to father, sister, mother,  
A kindly welcome I shall meet ;  
Still shall I feel there is one other,  
Whose gentle smile were far more sweet.

Farewell ! 'tis true the days are numbered,  
By which from thee I am detained ;  
But now with lead the hours seem cumbered,  
And Time's strong pinions seem enchained.

When I am sitting by thy side, love,  
How softly swift the moments fly ;  
But when thy presence is denied, love,  
How languishingly they creep by.

Farewell, farewell ! ah ! they who never  
Have truly loved can never tell  
The pang that rends my heart whenever  
I breathe to thee that word—Farewell '

## CHAPTER VIII.

was on the morning of the day on which Louisa was expected to return to Melbridge, that Ferdinand Castleton and Wentworth were pacing up and down the gravelled terrace that extended in front of the house. It was but a short time since they had walked there together, after having witnessed Louisa's departure for Appleford Castle. The flowers that were then blooming had not yet withered nor dropped from their stalks. The field of corn, on which the reapers had that morning commenced their operations, was not yet entirely got in—the threshing stones in the lane outside the garden

had not yet been beaten down—everything external spoke of the shortness of the interval—but in Wentworth's heart what a change had taken place! When he saw her depart, it was indeed with a sad, but still with a hopeful spirit. He was now awaiting her return with dread and despair. He had informed Mr. Castleton of the unfortunate issue of his expedition to the ball; and the latter, though he had felt sure that Louisa could never have intended to have given him pain, could not but admit that the circumstance was very unfavourable to his hopes. Even Louisa's letter to her father, in which she mentioned that Susan had told her that Mr. Wentworth had been vexed and annoyed at her conduct, and begged her father to assure him that it was mere thoughtlessness on her part—and, as she said, to make her peace with him—showed plainly enough that she had never even dreamt of entertaining feelings



of a tenderer nature than regard and esteem for him ; but Mr. Castleton, while he admitted this, urged that it was far better that Wentworth should not appear to shun her society, but should continue on the same apparent terms of intimacy as heretofore.

“As long as you continue my curate, my dear Wentworth,” he said, “it will seem very strange that any change should take place in our habits of intimacy. She has evidently no idea of your attachment ; will, therefore, be much better that for the present you should control your feelings, and see as much of her as you used to do. If, after a time, you find that this state of things is too painful for you to endure, it will then be better for all parties that we should part, and that you should seek some other sphere of employment. If you take my advice, and determine upon this course, it would be better that you should boldly seek the first opportunity of getting over your first interview.

"The ice will soon be broken, and you will find it easier to adapt yourself to this new and strange order of events."

It was in accordance with this advice that Westworth was now at the Rectory, awaiting the arrival of the fair being whom he both longed and dreaded again to see.

Their conversation naturally turned upon the one topic so interesting to them both. For Mr. Castleton thought that when a subject was necessarily uppermost in the minds of two people, it was better to discuss it openly than to brood over it secretly, while each was trying to keep up a conversation on indifferent topics, in which neither felt the slightest interest.

"I am sure," said Ferdinand, "that I should much have preferred that this visit at Stapleford, with all its consequences, had never taken place. If this young Louisa be really honourable in his intentions, and obtains his father's sanction to his marriage with Louisa, it will, I fear, cost her entire separation from me; and

if he has only been flirting with her, without any ulterior views, he may have ruined my child's peace of mind for ever. Believe me, I feel most sincerely for you too, Wentworth; I know what true love is—and I can well imagine that from the many opportunities you have enjoyed of seeing and associating with Louisa, your affection for her is of no ordinary kind—still we must remember that many men do meet with disappointments in love, and do afterwards wonderfully get over them, and that sometimes very happy marriages have taken place after an early disappointment has been experienced. Do not despair, therefore, nor think that the happiness of your whole life is at an end, because the dream of your youth has been somewhat rudely dispelled.”

“Dear Mr. Castleton,” replied Wentworth, “I am much, very much obliged to you for your attempts at consoling me; but believe me, at present every such attempt is vain. But forgive me, if I seem

to be personal, when I remind you that when the rude hand of death put a period to your happiness, you never sought or found consolation in any other attachment."

"True, Wentworth, but the cases are not parallel. You will, perhaps, smile incredulously at my saying so; but in my opinion, and judging by my experience, the love of a lover is not to be compared to the love of a husband. The former may be the more apparent—the more obtrusive, so to speak—but the latter lies the deeper, and glows the warmer. The one may be compared to the flame that flickers in the open air; the other to the incandescent metal which lies glowing within the furnace. The one is the branch, which may be lopped off, while the tree, though shorn of some of its beauty, stands as firmly as ever; the other is the root, which lies indeed underground, and out of sight, but which if we remove, the whole tree totters to its fall. Nay, there would

be no comparison, even if the object of our affection had reciprocated our love, and were taken from us by death ; but in the case where we simply make the unpleasant discovery that our love is not returned, we may console ourselves that nothing is so likely as such a discovery to cool the affection itself. Dip your finger in spirits of wine and light it ; the flame will burn for a time without causing you inconvenience ; then, after giving you a momentary pang, it will expire for want of proper sustenance. So is it with unrequited love. Trust me, it will speedily burn itself out ; though not, I grant, without causing you some sharp pain in the process."

" Ah ! Mr. Castleton, now you are not speaking from your own experience. You have never known ' the pang of despised love. ' "

" No, I never have ;—that additional pang has been mercifully spared me, and I will not therefore underrate sufferings of

which I know not myself the full extent. But I will give you a motive for patience, which you cannot gainsay. It is but the old story, but it cannot be too often repeated. 'Everything is ordained for the best.' We are in the hands of one who knows far better than we do what is best for us, and we should have *faith* and trust in him. It may be for your happiness even in this world that Louisa should reject your suit. If not at present, it undoubtedly will contribute to it in the future."

"Well, I will try and think so," replied Wentworth, sighing; "but do you then think that there is no hope for me—that nothing may make a change in Miss Castleton's sentiments?"

"Nay, I do not say so," replied Ferdinand; "her passion for this Lennox may be less than you think for. It may be merely a girlish fancy—she may find him unworthy—or he may prove faithless. In any or all of which cases your chance is

by no means hopeless. I would only advise you to prepare yourself for the worst ; and if you afterwards find you are more fortunate than you expect, your happiness will be all the greater—but hush ! I think I hear the carriage. Yes, there it is ; now courage, my good fellow ; meet her as if nothing was the matter, and let nothing occur, if we can help it, to prevent a recurrence of the good old times.”

In a few minutes more the carriage drew up at the door. Louisa sprang out and was clasped in the arms of her father. Wentworth looked first red and then pale, but he controlled his emotions, and when he pressed her hand, it was with the cordial grasp of the old and valued friend, not the ardent pressure of the eager lover.

The first greetings over, Louisa turned to Wentworth, and said, in a tone of great gentleness,—

“I hope, Mr. Wentworth, you have forgiven me for my rudeness at the ball the other night. I assure you it was

quite unintentional, but I had no idea that you could care about dancing with me—one whom you see so constantly. And indeed," she added in a tone of playful reproach, "I have almost a right to be angry with you, for thinking it possible that I could intentionally be rude to such an old and valued friend; but, I believe, after all, that Susan deceived me in order to tease me, and that you were not really so angry as she represented you."

"Nay," said Wentworth, speaking with as much apparent unconcern as he could muster, "it was not *anger* that I felt, and if Miss Vernon spoke of it, she did indeed misrepresent me. Indeed, it was foolish of me to be annoyed at all, but I confess I did feel rather hurt at the 'old and valued friend,' as you are pleased to call me, being thrown aside for a new comer, who had not been known to you for as many days as I had been for years."

At these words a bright blush passed over Louisa's face, but she only answered,



"That would be all very well, Mr. Wentworth, if I had not hoped to see you again; but at that time I thought I was to return home in a day or two, and that then you could see as much or more of me than you liked, while the gentleman I was dancing with would have gone away, and perhaps might never see me again."

At the vision conjured up by her words—the bare idea of a final parting from Lennox—the tears sprang to her eyes. She, however, repressed them so effectually, that a less keen observer than Wentworth would have been unconscious of their existence. They did not escape his observation, however, any more than the bright blush which had just previously illuminated her beauty had done. He heaved a deep and bitter sigh, as every fresh circumstance occurred to confirm his suspicions. For although these suspicions had already almost amounted to certainties, every fresh proof gave an additional wound to his

bleeding heart. Having now, therefore, broken the ice, and gone through his first interview with Louisa, he determined to escape from a scene that was so painful to him, and to leave Louisa alone with her father. After promising, therefore, to dine with them on the following day, he took his departure, pleading an engagement in the village.

From this time matters went on much as usual at Shelbridge. Wentworth resumed his old habits of intimacy, and as the name of Lennox was never mentioned, he began to hope that by degrees the impression that had been made on Louisa's heart might be effaced. He knew nothing of the proposed visit that Lennox was to pay at Moor Park. Louisa, however, as may easily be supposed, had not forgotten it. She had at first hoped that Mrs. Vernon might ask her to go there and meet him ; but as time passed on, and no invitation arrived, she gave that up as hopeless ; but still she thought that, when he

was there, he would certainly find some means of riding or driving over, and paying a visit at Shelbridge.

One morning she was startled at receiving a letter from Susan on black-edged paper. She hastily opened it, and found that it contained an intimation of the death of a sister of the late Mr. Vernon's, who had left all her property, amounting to upwards of £40,000, between her two nieces, Susan and Isabella. Louisa, however, could not rejoice so heartily at her friend's good fortune as she would otherwise have done, as Mrs. Vernon was compelled by the death of her sister-in-law to give up her party for the archery meeting, and Lennox's visit was consequently postponed till after Christmas.

Poor Louisa! she did not know how much she had been counting on seeing Lennox again shortly, till the hope of doing so was thus taken from her. She

did feel bitterly disappointed. There was no help for it, however, and she resigned herself as well as she could to the force of circumstances, and looked forward with the greatest anxiety and impatience to the advent of Christmas.

## PART IV.

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## THE HALL.

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### CHAPTER I.

It had seemed a long time to Louisa, in the beginning of September, to look forward to Lennox's visit to Moor Park, which was postponed till "Christmas," which, in the ordinary acceptation of that term, might mean any time before the end of January. But, however tardily time may appear to move at first, it is astonishing how rapidly it does contrive to get

over the ground, so that even the most anxious are sometimes astonished at finding the time of their suspense actually drawing to its conclusion. It was so with Louisa. She had thought, in the words of those verses which she found in her music book, and which she could not doubt had been placed there by Lennox, that

"Now with lead the hours seem cumbered,  
And Time's strong pinions seem enchained."

And, if the period had seemed so long when their separation was only to be, she fondly hoped, for a few weeks—how could she bear the tardiness of the flight of time, when it was to be extended over months! Still, after a short space, she found that the time was stealing rapidly, though almost imperceptibly away. The constant round of her daily duties and occupations served to beguile it; and more rapidly than she could have believed possible, did summer merge into autumn, and autumn into winter, while the leaves

on the trees turned from green to yellow, and finally dropped off and rotted on the ground, the sport of every gust of wind, that drifting down the valley despoiled the trees of their covering, even earlier than in apparently less sheltered places.

It is not, however, with Louisa that we have now to do. We must follow the fortunes of Lennox, as, on a stormy day in the early part of January, he was wending his way to Mrs. Vernon's hospitable mansion at Moor Park.

That worthy lady had not failed to inform him, when she wrote to postpone his visit in the previous September, of the good fortune that had befallen her daughters, in the shape of the large legacy they had inherited from their aunt.

We must do Lennox the justice to say, that this information had but little effect upon him at the time it was made. His heart was far too much occupied with the image of Louisa, for any other connexion, however advantageous it might have ap-

peared to him a month previously, to receive any serious attention from him. As time ran on, however, the impression produced by Louisa had been weakened partly by absence from her, and partly by the continual presence of the girl Mary Brown, who entertained the most ardent affection for him, and for whom in return he could not avoid feeling a certain regard, especially as there was now no doubt that she would in a few months become a mother. He was now, therefore, in a mood to weigh more calmly the relative advantages of marriage with Louisa, and of one with Isabella Vernon, whose consent he did not much doubt that he could easily obtain. On the one hand (as far as he was capable of feeling the passion which bears that much abused name), he really loved Louisa. And, *cæteris paribus*, there was no question as to which he should prefer. And then, if all went according to his wishes, she would prove a far greater heiress than Isabella. But then there was



a great risk to be run. Even supposing Lord Abbotsham had no children, both he and Ferdinand were comparatively young men, and might live for the next twenty or even thirty years, and in the meantime what was he to do? His own father's life would, in all human probability, draw to a close long before that of either of them, and he would be left with a title, and only expectations to support it; while Isabella Vernon had £30,000 at once, besides, probably, something like £20,000 more *in futuro*. But yet, when he came to think of giving up Louisa Castleton, and making up to Isabella, he sickened at the thought of the contrast between them. "Besides, after all," he suddenly reflected, "perhaps, though Isabella Vernon always set her cap at me before, she might not think me good enough for her, now that she has got an additional £20,000 to her fortune. She may look for some richer peer, or for the heir-apparent of an earl at least. The eldest son of a poor baron may very pos-

sibly not be sufficient for her." These and many other reflections passed through his mind, as the fly which was conveying him from the railway station jolted, and bumped, and thumped along the road in which the autumn and wintry rains had caused sundry holes and ruts, which by no means improved the comfort of the traveller.

"Well, if ever I ~~am~~ a rich man," thought he to himself, "I will take good care that I never travel without my own carriage. These confounded flies are enough to dislocate every bone in one's body; £30,000 now, and twenty more hereafter, not a bad spec, certainly. But then that lovely, innocent Louisa! no! I would rather have her without a farthing, if I could but afford it. And, as I can't, I would rather have her with half the money than Isabella with the whole. I wonder what the governor will say, if I press him next year to let me marry Louisa. I know he thinks it a very wild

speculation, and would much rather I married Isabella, with her money down, and no risk."

A sudden swerve of the carriage here nearly threw him off the seat, and thereby disturbed the current of his meditations. As he looked out of the window to see what had frightened the horse, he found that it was nothing but a donkey, an animal at the appearance of which horses always exhibit great repugnance. He was just turning his head away again with a passing wonder, as to *why* horses should be always so much alarmed at a creature bearing so many points of resemblance to themselves, when he was struck by the appearance of a girl, who, with a party of others, apparently gipsies, was accompanying the animal. In an instant he recognised the gipsy girl, whom he had encountered in his long walk with Louisa at Stapleford Castle, and who had told their fortunes for them. She, apparently, was equally quick in recognising

him, but, in the brief space that elapsed, ere the motion of the carriage removed her from his view, he could see that her eye gleamed with intelligence, while she raised her forefinger, and shook it slowly and threateningly at him.

"Strange," thought he to himself, "what an impression that girl's words have produced upon me. Constantly I detect myself repeating them, and her concluding threat about my future wife seems to possess an importance that my reason assures me is not due to it, especially after the account we heard of her history and her peculiar delusions. I am sure, if I marry Louisa, I cannot find a punishment in her, except, to be sure, that poverty may be a punishment, and that it may so far be a punishment in her, as I may see her suffering from the want of pleasures and luxuries that I shall not have the means of procuring for her. But, after all, how absurd it is to think that that gipsy girl can possibly know what I do not

even know myself. But, however, at any rate, I wish I was arrived, for it is getting very dark, and I am getting very cold, and the sight of that gipsy and her threatening gestures has not improved the equanimity of my temper. One comfort—whatever Mrs. Vernon's faults may be—one is sure of meeting with a good dinner and a comfortable lodging. I wonder how that little minx, Isabella, will behave—whether she will be as insinuating as ever, or whether her £20,000 will make her carry her head so high that she will not stoop to notice such as I. At any rate, I have some claim on the gratitude of the family, for having pulled that dear, good, ugly Susan out of the water. Not that I suppose they will thank me very much for that, for I believe they had just as soon have had her drowned, and then Miss Isabella would have had all the fortune to herself. Wouldn't she just have been a catch then? Oh, my eyes!"

As this somewhat unrefined exclamation

passed his lips—for when he was by himself he sometimes allowed his thoughts to clothe themselves in half-uttered words—the stoppage of the vehicle announced that they were at the entrance of Moor Park. He gazed from the window, in hopes of seeing what kind of place it was; but the darkness had now increased to such an extent, that nothing was visible save the outlines of a few leafless trees, and sandy patches of snow, which, having fallen a day or two previously, were now rapidly melting away under the influence of the down-pouring rain.

Before, however, he had expected—for the park was of no great extent—a dark mass of buildings, enlivened here and there by gleaming lights, announced that he was on the point of arriving at the termination of his journey; and heartily glad he was when, cold and damp, he sprang out of the dripping fly, and stood within the warm, well-lighted hall, where one servant officiously assisted him in throwing off his great coat,

While another prepared to announce his arrival to the mistress of the mansion

He soon found that he had no reason to complain of want of cordiality in his reception. Mrs. Vernon shook hands with him with a warmth calculated, if possible, to remove the sense of her exceeding vulgarity, with which he was overpowered. Isabella welcomed him with a glance of the eye that he well knew how to interpret ; while even Susan, the shy, retiring Susan, came forward with an energy unusual to her, especially at home, to express her gratification at again seeing him who had rescued her from a watery grave, and who, she fondly hoped, was destined to be the husband of her dearest friend.

Delighted, both at his release from his tedious journey, and at the cordiality with which he was received, Lennox outshone himself, and made himself so generally agreeable, that the dreary period which generally elapses between the arrival of company and their being shown to their

rooms, passed off with a rapidity unexampled in the annals of country houses.

There were other guests present besides himself, and amongst them our old acquaintance, Thornton. The rest of the company consisted principally of country neighbours, as there was no one now in London to come down, and people inhabiting distant parts of the country were but little inclined to leave their comfortable homes and undertake a long and wearisome journey, for the sake of any attractions that it was in Mrs. Vernon's power to offer. Lennox, therefore, was a stranger to by far the greater number of them. He managed, however, so well, as to be on terms of acquaintanceship with most of them before they retired to dress for dinner.

When they were re-assembled in the drawing-room, Lennox perceived, to his no small disgust, that his rank would procure for him the unenviable honour of escorting Mrs. Vernon to dinner. He would have thought this a bore under any cir-



cumstances, especially as he was indolent and hated the trouble of carving; but it so happened that to Mrs. Vernon he had a very particular aversion. With all his faults—and he doubtless had many—Lennox was a thorough gentleman in refinement of manners and appearance, and nothing was so repugnant to him as anything that savoured of vulgarity. Now, Mrs. Vernon was one of those people who are so intrinsically vulgar, that they can neither eat, nor speak, nor even think, without betraying themselves. And hers, too, was the kind of vulgarity that Lennox most detested, the vulgarity of pretension. It was, therefore, with no very agreeable feelings that he contemplated the fate that was in store for him; and he speculated with considerable anxiety on who his other neighbour at dinner might be, and whether he could, without incivility, devote himself to her, and leave Mrs. Vernon to her own meditations or the tender care of her other cavalier. He recollected how well he had

managed at Stapleford, where he had never been able to take Louisa in to dinner, and where, nevertheless, he had always sat next to her, and devoted himself to her. As he thought of those happy days, he heaved a deep sigh, and then, seeing Susan sitting by herself and not speaking to any one, he went up to her, and asked her whether she had heard from her friend, Miss Castleton, lately?

Susan answered, with a smile, that she was never very long without hearing from her, and that, in fact, she had a letter from her two or three days ago. She added, that she had driven over to see her a short time back, and that Shelbridge Parsonage was only a few miles from Moor Park, quite an easy drive. She looked up so archly at Lennox as she said this, that he thought her quite pretty, and said that he should endeavour to obtain the loan of a horse in a day or two and ride over, as he was very anxious to see Miss Castleton again, and to have an opportunity of

ing his respects to her father. At this  
 ment dinner was announced, and Lennox  
 d himself, as he had expected, at-  
 ed to the wing of Mrs. Vernon: He, of  
 e, went into the room last, and found  
 the confusion about taking seats, usu-  
 incidental to the first assembling of a  
 , was in full action. He watched the  
 next to his with some anxiety, and  
 ght it seemed probable that Susan  
 d be his neighbour, when, to his  
 ise, Isabella coming up whispered  
 Susan's ear, and she and her com-  
 on immediately proceeded to the other  
 of the table, while Isabella quietly en-  
 ed herself in the vacant seat. Lennox  
 by no means pleased at this arrange-  
 . At any other time he would have  
 glad enough to sit by Isabella, who  
 ew could rattle on and amuse him,  
 e wanted just then to talk to Susan  
 : Louisa, and proceed with the con-  
 tion which had been interrupted by  
 dvent of dinner.

Isabella, however, seemed to have no idea of the state of his feelings, for as soon as the general hum of voices permitted her to make an observation without being overheard, she whispered to him—"Now are you not very much obliged to me, for enlivening you with my agreeable company?—you know very well that between mamma and Susan you would have been bored to death."

Lennox, of course, could only bow low and smile, and say that under any circumstances the pleasure of her company would be *the* thing he should like best, and the granting of which would be a favour for which he could never be sufficiently grateful—inwardly cursing her officiousness, and wishing she had left matters as they were.

He was not a man, however, to quarrel with his bread and butter; and seeing that he could not talk to Susan, as he wished, about Louisa, he began to talk to Isabel about herself, and then ensued one of those flirting, "chaffing" conversations, in which

both Lennox and Isabella were adepts, and which consequently may be imagined to have been carried on with great success, though the details would probably not prove interesting to the reader.

In the course of their conversation Isabella enquired the circumstances attending Susan's accident, and said she believed Susan was so frightened that she hardly knew what was going on. "Above all," said she, "tell me about Mr. Thornton and Mrs. Macdonald, what happened to them when the boat upset?"

"The last I saw of Thornton," said Lennox, "was when he was hanging on to the branch of a tree, with Mrs. Macdonald holding on by his legs. I believe they were picked up afterwards by a boat, but I have never seen Thornton since. I was confined to my room for some days after the accident, and Thornton was gone before I made my appearance in the drawing-room."

"But did you then never hear the *dénouement* of the affair between him and Mrs. Macdonald?"

"No, never; I did not even know that there had been a denouement."

"Oh, yes! but there was. A day or two after the 'drowning,' just before they were to leave the castle, Mr. Thornton finding himself alone with Mrs. Macdonald, took upon himself to make the modest request, that she should leave her husband and go and live with him."

"No! you don't say so! and what did she say?"

"She burst out laughing—told him that he was the greatest fool she had met for a long time, that she should certainly tell dear George, and that, if he didn't take care and keep out of the way, dear George would probably thrash him within an inch of his life."

"Well, and what happened next?"

"Oh the little man was frightened out of his seventeen senses, as they say, and took his departure immediately, though he was not to have gone till the next morning, but he pretended he had had a message from

home, ordered out his dog-cart, jumped in, and drove off, in bodily fear, lest the redoubtable George should make his appearance with a horsewhip."

"What fun ! but how did you hear it ?"

"Hear it ! why, how was it you didn't hear it ? Mrs. Macdonald, of course, could not keep the story to herself, though, in my opinion, it tells quite as much against her as against Mr. Thornton. However, tell which way it would, she could not keep it to herself, and amongst others narrated the whole history to my discreet sister Susan, from whom I, with some difficulty (for she is as close as Mrs. Macdonald is open), have wormed it out."

Lennox could not help thinking that Susan probably knew much that he should like to worm out, and he longed for the time when he could have some private conversation with her. However he did not allow his dialogue with Isabella to flag, and he was surprised to find how rapidly the time allotted to dinner slipped

away. Mrs. Vernon had not troubled him much. She had got a Mrs. Turner, a lady somewhat of her own style and calibre, seated next but one to her, and with her she had been carrying on a loud laughing conversation, which, while it very much favoured the *sotto voce* whisperings of Lennox and Isabella, completely dismayed the unfortunate gentleman who had taken Mrs. Turner into dinner, and sitting between her and Mrs. Vernon, and not being on very intimate terms with either of them, was reduced to a state of abject silence, during the vociferous repartees of his two lively neighbours.

When dinner was over, and the gentlemen, having finished their wine, had rejoined the ladies, Lennox seized the long looked-for opportunity of speaking to Susan. From her he gathered all that was to be told about Louisa, which, after all, was not much ; for Louisa's life had been an uneventful one, since they had parted ; and though her correspondence



with Susan had been constant, she had not been able to tell her much that Susan could retail to Lennox's anxious ears. His eagerness to hear about her, though, was sufficiently apparent to check any doubts that Susan might have conceived as to his constancy. And when she retired to rest that night, it was with a light heart and a confident hope that all would go well, and that the most earnest wish of her heart, short of obtaining Wentworth's affection for herself, was in a fair way of being gratified.

Lennox himself felt far more firmly persuaded of the depth of his own love for Louisa, than he had even a few short hours before. The sight of Susan, and the subject of her conversation, had awakened in him many slumbering sensations. A chord of his memory had been struck, which yet vibrated strongly to the touch, and when he laid his head on his pillow, his dreams were all of Louisa Castleton; so much so, that, when he awoke in the

morning, it was with a feeling of disappointment that he was not to meet her, as of old, at the breakfast table.

Whether his dreams had been so pleasant, that he had indulged in an undue allowance of sleep, or whether his waking thoughts had been so absorbing, as materially to delay his dressing ; certain it is, that, when he entered the breakfast-room, the rest of the party were not only assembled, but absolutely seated at the table.

The only unoccupied place was by Isabella, and even that was occupied by that young lady's gloves and pocket-handkerchief. She removed them as he approached the chair, saying at the same time, in a low voice,—

“How late you are ! I thought you were never coming. I have had the greatest difficulty in keeping this place for you. I put my handkerchief and gloves there on purpose, but even then I was very near falling a victim to that vulgar wretch, young Thornton.”

Lennox bowed his thanks and appreciation of the compliment she had paid him, though he thought internally how his heart would have bounded, had Louisa Castleton betrayed the same anxiety to have him for a neighbour; while in the present instance, he fancied he felt indifferent to the compliment, though his vanity was more flattered by it than he was aware of, or was willing to acknowledge even to himself.

After breakfast, the party adjourned to the drawing-room, where they remained clustered around the fire, talking of little nothings for some time, till Isabella calling Lennox aside, ostensibly to give his opinion of a piece of worsted-work, whispered to him,—

“They are all so stupid here! Come and have a game at billiards.”

Lennox not unwillingly complied; and they went to the billiard-room, and began knocking the balls about, beguiling the time with lively chat. Lennox soon be-

came really interested in the conversation, for Isabella was far superior to most young ladies in mental acquirements, and, while she could flirt and talk nonsense by the hour, was also fully capable of engaging in real conversation on many subjects of interest. She was well read in both poetry and history ; and, as Lennox himself was fond of literature, there were many topics on which they could talk, and in which it was either pleasant to find that she agreed with him, or interesting to argue points when they differed. The time, therefore, flew rapidly by ; and though he at first determined that he would endeavour to borrow a horse and ride over to Shelbridge in the course of the afternoon, he now reflected that it would be rather uncivil to desert his hosts on the first day of his arrival, and that it would be better to postpone his intention at any rate until the morrow. Besides, a somewhat sharp frost had set in during the night, which, following the rain of the

previous evening, had rendered the roads so slippery, that riding would be anything but a pleasant, and might be even a dangerous occupation.

Under these circumstances, it was not difficult to persuade himself that his best course would be to join the rest of the party in the walk, which appeared to be the only amusement that the state of the weather permitted.

There was a weir in the river not far from Moor Park, and it was supposed that the rain that had fallen the previous day, added to the melting of the snow which had been lying on the ground for a week or more, would cause a body of water to fall over the cascade, which might make it more worth seeing than usual, and at any rate might furnish an object for a walk.

After luncheon, accordingly, the whole party set out on this expedition, and Lennox, who had got all he could out of Susan, and knew little and cared less for the rest of the party, attached himself to

Isabella

In doing so, he might have been aware that he would draw down upon himself the observations of the rest of the party, who, particularly the young lady portion of them, were by no means pleased that he, who was decidedly the most eligible young man of the party, should devote himself during the whole of the morning to Isabella Vernon, and appear inclined to do so for the rest of the afternoon likewise. He might have known this, but it did not occur to him ; and if it had, it would have made no difference. What they might say or think, was a matter of perfect indifference to him, and he never stopped to reflect whether it might be fraught with more serious consequences to any other parties ;—whether Isabella Vernon's name might suffer, or whether the tidings of his apparent devotion to her might not reach the ears of Louisa Castleton, and cause her pain of which he could form no conception.

Considerations such as these never en-

tered his head, for he was one of those *passively* selfish people, who, in pursuance of their own immediate and momentary gratification, are utterly heedless of the effect it may produce upon others. Had it been pointed out to him, he might, perhaps, have paused in his career, for he was not malignant, and would not willingly inflict injury ; but as there was no one to do this for him, he went on his course, doing whatsoever was most pleasing in his own sight, and following in all cases the impulse of the moment.

His heedlessness, however, of other people's observations did not render them less likely to be made ; and, in fact, he had not walked many hundred yards by the side of Isabella, ere Miss Turner, a young lady of the party, who had been out an indefinite number of seasons, and was more than ordinarily anxious to be soon "settled," asked Mr. Thornton, who happened to be next to her, whether there was anything serious between "them?"

coming with her home at London and  
 home.

"Oh no, I worry not," was the reply  
 "I am a very simple girl. The last  
 time I was here was at Stapleford Castle  
 and it was in just the same way that  
 you Miss Castleton. In fact, there was  
 all through that there really was something  
 wrong, and in fact, I believe she was  
 really passionately in love with him, po-  
 tently. But now I see he seems inclined  
 to do just in the same way with M<sup>rs</sup>  
 Isabella Turner as I suppose it is a w  
 as he has not think he will  
 make her in the matter. do you?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, only because I should not thi  
 that young lady's heart was very susc  
 time. But I should think she was quite  
 devoted to him in the flirting way."

"I think it is very wrong of you to  
 at," replied Miss Turner, secretly delight  
 thought of having a young lady whom  
 sometimes considered a rival found for



h, and that by a young man, too, who  
heir to so large a fortune.

The fact was, that Thornton had at one  
e flattered himself that he had made  
impression on Isabella ; hence the  
terness of his remarks.

## CHAPTER II.

LENNEX and Isabella, however, pursued their walk in happy ignorance of the comments of which they were the object.

After discussing various topics, they at length fell to arguing the respective merits of the tragedies of Shakspeare. when Lennex declared that for his own part, he preferred *Romeo and Juliet* to any.

"No does everybody when they are in love," replied Isabella: "and this opinion of yours gives credibility to the report, so widely spread last summer, that you were desperately smitten with that Miss Castleton whom you met at Stapleford Castle. If you will pray make me your confidante, for

I like being behind the scenes in a real love affair, above all things."

"I should have thought, Miss Vernon," replied Lennox, evading the question, "that you had sufficient experience of the world to be aware how very little reports, such as you allude to, are to be relied on."

"So then, it is not true?" interposed Isabella. "Then I am sure I don't know why Susan always looked so mysterious whenever I asked her about it. From her looks, whenever the subject was mentioned, I always thought she was the depositary of some tremendous secret—perhaps the happy confidante of both parties. But after all, then, there was nothing in it? Well, I shall give Susan a good scolding for not having told us so at once."

"I don't know what you mean by there being 'nothing in it,'" said Lennox, now really provoked and perplexed as to what he should say, for he had no intention of confessing to Isabella his love for Louisa; and yet, if he denied that he cared about

her, he knew that his denial might very easily reach her ears, and do him great injury in her estimation.

“What I mean by there being nothing in it? Why, I simply mean that, after all the talking there has been about you, you are nothing but common acquaintances after all.”

“And what more should we be?” enquired Lennox, still endeavouring to parry the attack.

“Oh! there are many things you might be; you might be in love with her, or she might be in love with you. You may be a rejected suitor, or possibly an accepted one. Each and all of these relations would take you out of the category of common acquaintances.”

“Well,” said he, “I am glad you have given me something definite to reply to at last. And now I can solemnly assure you, since you seem to take so kind an interest in the matter, that I have certainly never proposed to Miss Castleton, and can, there-

fore, neither be an accepted or discarded suitor."

"But you admire her very much?"

"I certainly do think her very pretty, and, as far as I am aware, she is both agreeable and amiable."

"In short, Mr. Lennox, you are fairly caught. Well, I wish you all happiness, though I confess I don't admire your taste."

"And pray may I ask why?"

"No, indeed. In the first place, you would certainly quarrel with me for finding fault with your idol; and, in the second, it is difficult to account for tastes. You know the old song:—

' I do not like you, Dr. Fell,  
The reason why I cannot tell;  
But this alone I know full well,  
I do not like you, Dr. Fell.' "

"And so poor Miss Castleton is 'Dr. Fell' to you?"

"Oh no! not that. I don't know enough of her to dislike her, but I do not admire

her much, I confess. However, as I said before, tastes differ, and on the subject of ladies, a gentleman's judgment is far more valuable than that of one of our sex. Only if you really do care about her, and take an interest in her welfare, I would advise you to get a hint privately conveyed to her, not to lace quite so tightly ; for she will certainly shorten her days, if she does."

" But do you think she really does ?"

" Well, really, Mr. Lennox, Cupid must indeed be blind not to see that that very diminutive waist *cannot* be natural, and that very pink colour looks symptomatic of a screw being loose somewhere. However, it is no use talking to you on this head. If Susan herself told you, you would not believe it."

" But supposing your cruel suggestion to be true, Miss Vernon, and that Miss Castleton does owe her taper waist to art as well as nature, is that the only point in which your taste finds fault with her ?"

" My taste ? oh, no ! I was not giving you a reason for her not being to my taste, but

merely suggesting a friendly caution. I told you I could not give you my reasons for her not being to my taste ; but since you insist upon it, I will tell you thus much, that it is not her person I find fault with, so much as her manner."

" Her manner ? You will laugh at me for being so prejudiced in her favour, but I should have thought her manner had been above reproach."

" No doubt you think so, for of course she was amiable enough to you ; but do you not think that, if you had been a disinterested spectator, and seen some one else in your place, that you would have deemed her manner towards that somebody else a *little* too *empresée* ; and that for a young lady at first coming out, she got over her ' shyness' wonderfully easily."

Isabella's attention was here taken up by some one else, and their conversation was broken off, leaving Lennox in an uneasy, dissatisfied state of mind. He knew very well that Isabella's statements and opinions

were by no means to be relied on, but still she had more than hinted that her information as to the "tight lacing" was derived from Susan; and there certainly might be some truth in the assertion that to others Louisa's manner towards him might have appeared too unrestrained. It is always disagreeable, particularly in the early stages of being in love, to find that the soundness of one's judgment is doubted by others: our reason always whispers to us that we are in danger of being blinded by our passion, and we eagerly look for collateral evidence to assure us that our judgment has not been a mistaken one. Other people, he thought, might share Isabella's opinion—she could hardly have dared to express it if it had been only her own—and then she can have no sufficient motive, for surely the desire of rivalling Louisa Castleton can never be powerful enough to urge her to slander her in her absence.

Now he thought he would ask Susan—but, after all, Susan was as much likely to



be blinded by her attachment to Louisa, as he himself was. Besides, he had not much opinion of Susan's judgment—she had too little knowledge of the world—and was too romantic. And then how was he to set about it? “Pray, Miss Vernon, can you tell me, does Miss Castleton lace her stays too tight?”—or, “Do you think that Miss Castleton's manner to me at Stapleford was more *empresée* than was consistent with propriety?” No; this would never do. And then he found fault with himself, for being so much disturbed about the matter. What could the idle talk of a mischievous girl signify? but he could not nevertheless quite shake off the impression. He had rather a respect for Isabella's opinion; he knew her to be clever, and he believed her to be cold and passionless, and therefore, as he thought, unlikely to be biassed. Her criticism, therefore, affected him more than he liked to confess even to himself; and though he still meditated a ride over to Shelbridge on the first opportunity, he de-

terminated to be on his guard and watch narrowly, and with (he flattered himself) an unprejudiced eye, all that occurred, before he any further committed himself.

He had been walking moodily by himself for some time, absorbed in these reflections, when he heard a party laughing at some little distance from him, and presently Mrs. Vernon's loud voice pronouncing his name fell upon his ear.

Upon his looking up, that lady addressed him with—

“ Oh, Mr. Lennox ! we were just talking about you. I want Mr. Thornton to go out shooting to-morrow, but he does not care to go by himself, and we were just saying that it would be cruel to ask you to accompany him, as, of course, you are dying to go to Shelbridge; and, indeed, we think ourselves excessively fortunate that you have not deserted us to day to go and worship at the shrine of the fair goddess we know of in that quarter.”

As this was said in a loud, bantering tone

in the presence of some half-dozen listeners, of whom the ladies quietly tittered, while the gentlemen openly laughed, Lennox felt provoked and annoyed to no ordinary degree. He said however, suppressing his indignation—

“ I know of no goddess or shrine which could tempt me away from the pleasure of such a walk as this ; but if this enjoyment is not to be repeated to-morrow, I shall be very happy to shoot with Thornton, or do any thing else in my power to contribute to the amusement of the party”—except by being the object of its ridicule and remark—he muttered between his teeth ; but these last words were not generally audible.

“ Oh, very well,” replied Mrs. Vernon, “ just as you please. If you and Mr. Thornton like to go out in the morning, I will give orders to the keeper to be in attendance ; but I hope you are not putting any constraint on yourself. There is a horse quite at your service if you prefer riding to Shelbridge, though, to be sure, the weather is not particularly favourable for riding ;

but we expected that no considerations of time or weather could weigh with you against the simple fact that Shelbridge was within distance, and that you might once more behold a certain young lady."

Here was a fresh annoyance for Lennox. The being cross-questioned and examined by Miss Isabella was a matter that he did not very much care about ; nor would he have cared at anything people might have *thought* about his affair with Miss Castleton, but to be held up to ridicule before the whole party by such a person as Mrs. Vernon, was *too* much ; and rather than expose himself to another such attack, he at once accepted the offer of shooting with Thornton, though the ride to Shelbridge, in spite of frost and ice, would have been far more agreeable to him. It never occurred to him to think of *Louisa's* feelings on the occasion. He must have known that she was aware of his being in the neighbourhood, as she was in constant correspondence with Susan, who would not

he likely to omit to mention such an interesting circumstance ; but he never pictured to himself her anxious suspense—her wonder whether he would come on that day—her disappointment at his non-appearance, and her hope that he would assuredly not fail to come on the next. It never entered his head that it would be worth while to brave the laughter or the sneers of his companions, for the sake of giving her he loved the pleasure of one brief hour of his society, or of saving her from the heart-sickness caused by hope deferred. No ! none of these considerations influenced his decision. He merely balanced his own gratification at seeing her against his own annoyance at being laughed at, and found that the former kicked the beam.

## CHAPTER III.

THE following day there was such a heavy fall of snow, that the boldest and most ardent sportsmen would have been fain to relinquish the pursuit of their game in favour of a snug fireside.

Lennox stood at the window after breakfast, looking at the thick and fast-falling flakes, which were rapidly obliterating the distinguishing features of the surrounding scenery. There was hardly any wind, so that the heavy flakes fell softly, silently, and regularly, each making an imperceptible addition to the mass beneath. Now and then the branch of a tree, groaning under its heavy burden, would gradually

bend down, until the superincumbent weight glided off and formed a small mound beneath it, when it would resume its former position. He was gazing upon the scene, and musing as he gazed, on the resemblance between the snow, which, concealing the features of the earth, causes grass plot and gravel walk, flower bed and icy pool, alike to present the same monotonous appearance to the eye;—and the formality of the world, which, repressing the display of natural feeling and emotion, conceals the passions, the feelings, the loves, and the hates of its denizens, under a similarly monotonous outward show of decorum.

“Thus it is,” thought he, “in the still, calm days of our routine pursuits; but let the storm pass over us, and the flimsy veil is swept aside, and the inner man is revealed in all his natural beauty or deformity.”

“What! pensive?” whispered a voice in his ear. “Is it the sport among the

pleasants, or the ride to a certain Rectory that you are so bitterly regretting?"

"Whatever it was," said he, gallantly, "I can have nothing to regret now; but, in real truth, I was not regretting anything then. I was only doing a little bit of moralising."

"Well, I am glad that you, at least, are not in the dumps," continued Isabella, "for I have just seen poor Mr. Thornton looking as melancholy as need be; but indeed, his poor man, has some reason, for he thinks he has lost his only chance of a companion in his shooting—for it would be too much to ask you to defer your visit to Shelbridge for yet another day—would it not, Mr. Lennox?"

"My engagement to Thornton, as it could not be fulfilled to-day, will, of course, be fulfilled to-morrow," replied Lennox, somewhat stiffly, for he was becoming angry at this constant "badgering" about Shelbridge.

"Indeed, well I am sure! it is very



of you," replied Isabella, who was  
ly rejoiced at hearing of his deter-  
ion. She had taken a violent dislike  
or Louisa, and *she* was perfectly aware  
Lennox's continued neglect must cause  
ute pain—as not merely her affec-  
but her womanly pride and natural  
, would, of course, be wounded by  
he also wished to keep them apart,  
a dread lest Louisa should, on a re-  
of their acquaintance, resume all  
rmer influence over Lennox's heart,  
, as she had seriously determined to  
, if possible, for herself, would be a  
very much to be deprecated. It  
herefore, been pre-arranged between  
la and her mother, that everything  
l be done and said to make Lennox's  
sed attachment to Louisa a source  
oyance to him, and, if possible, to  
him out of his proposed visit. An  
onal incentive to them in carrying  
is plan was, the vexation which they  
it would cause to Susan, who, never

a favourite with her mother and sister, had become doubly odious to them, since her visit to Stapleford Castle had been the means of proving that other people did not consider her in the same despicable light that they did. Lady Barbara had, on more than one occasion, complimented Mrs. Vernon on the good sense and amiable manners of her eldest daughter; and the words, though well-meant, had produced an effect the contrary to that which was expected. Instead of being pleased at hearing her daughter's praises, Mrs. Vernon seemed to consider them as insults to her own penetration. She could not see anything agreeable or amiable in Susan, and she thought that no one else, therefore, had any right to do so. When Lennox, on his arrival, showed such an inclination to pay particular attention to Susan, their indignation knew no bounds, and they then concocted their nefarious plan for estranging Lennox from Louisa, and thus causing pain and anguish of mind to

her, and annoyance and vexation to Susan —while they hoped that Isabella, by redoubling her efforts to amuse and to please, might still further succeed in weaning his heart from the object of its present devotion.

Isabella, however, knew well enough, that if she wished him to think her agreeable, she must not tease him too far ; so, having gained her point for the day, she turned the conversation, and soon succeeded in engaging him in an earnest and animated discussion, on some of the topics which she so well knew how to handle.

As they stood in the embrasure of the window, half concealed by the flowing draperies of the curtains, and deserted by the rest of the party, who had all gathered shivering around the blazing fire, they might well have passed in the eyes of an unprejudiced observer for an engaged couple ; and Susan, happening at the moment to enter the room, was suddenly struck with the same idea. An icy thrill shot through her

heart. What mischief, what ruin to all her deeply cherished plans might not this conjunction involve! She well knew the dangerous talent of fascination that her sister possessed over some minds, but she had never felt any alarm, as she considered Lennox as clothed in armour of proof by what she considered his deep and sincere love for Louisa. Knowing both the ladies too, as intimately as she did, she could not conceive how any one, who had once learnt to appreciate the excellencies of the one, could be blinded by the meretricious charms of the other. In fact, this last reflection somewhat reassured her now—and she felt convinced that Lennox could be only devoting himself to her sister, because, just at that present time, he had nothing better to do.

When, however, she found that, during the whole of that snowy day, when the inclemency of the weather detained the whole party within doors, Lennox was constantly by Isabella's side; that, at

billiards, at battledore and shuttlecock, at every other game adopted to wile away the long hours, they were always companions ; when she found that the ride to Shelbridge was again deferred ; when she saw that the next day he sat by her as usual at breakfast ; that he came home early from his shooting, and attaching himself again to her side, seemed determined to pursue the same course as on the previous day ; when she heard the whisperings, and saw the nods and winks of the rest of the party, then, indeed, she began to be seriously alarmed. It was necessary, too, that she should write to Louisa. She had owed her a letter for some days, and had only not written because she wished to be able to announce that Lennox was coming, or, possibly, to entrust the letter to his hands for delivery ; but now it was no longer possible to defer doing so. She had not even announced Lennox's arrival, and she guessed too truly the agonizing suspense that poor Louisa was in, knowing, as she did, that Lennox was expected

to arrive at Moor Park on the Monday, and neither seeing nor hearing anything of him by Thursday—she must then write ; but what could she say ? Could she say that Lennox had indeed arrived safely on Monday, but that she, writing on Thursday, could not say when he meant to pay a visit to Shelbridge ? She not only knew not what to say, but was almost equally at a loss as to what to think, or how to act under this new and unforeseen combination of circumstances. Supposing her to have any power, how should she use it ? Should she speak to Lennox, and remonstrate with him on trifling with the affections of both her sister and Miss Castleton ? That was clearly impossible. She had no right to interfere—and her interference would, probably, only have been laughed at, perhaps resented. Should she write to Louisa, to inform her fully of the unworthy behaviour of her former lover, and entreat her to dismiss him from her thoughts ? Alas ! she knew too well how unavailing such advice would be ; and,

moreover, she was deeply indebted to Lennox—he had saved her life—and his heart might still be Louisa's ; his desertion might be only apparent ; and, by lowering him in her estimation, she might be doing him the most grievous of injuries, instead of testifying her gratitude to the utmost of her power, as she ardently wished to do. And then if her information and advice did produce its effect—if she succeeded in weaning Louisa from Lennox at the expense of much present unhappiness certainly to one, possibly to both, would not she be likely, under the influence of her disappointment, to yield to the suit of Wentworth ? for, as a ball is often caught at the rebound, so a heart whose love has been rejected, is apt to become a willing captive to the first attack of a fresh suitor ; and thus her own hopes in that quarter might be utterly destroyed.

She tried to banish this consideration from her mind, however, as being selfish and unworthy of her, but it led her thoughts to Wentworth ; and as she reflected how

deeply she had suffered from the pangs of unrequited love, she breathed a fervent prayer that her young and lovely friend, so much less fitted than herself to struggle with adversity, might be spared the fiery trial. She felt at the same time that, if Lennox and Louisa were once brought together, all would go well, and she anxiously watched for some indication on his part of a determination to pay his visit on the morrow. It was his last day, for he was to return to town on the Saturday. There was almost time for him to gallop to Shelbridge and back even that day before dinner, though to be sure he would have had to ride home in the dark. Before, however, she began her letter, she felt that she must know something of his intentions: and, accordingly, advancing timidly towards him, she said—

“ Mr. Lennox, I am going to write to Louisa Castleton, and may save myself the expense of a postage stamp, if you are going over to Shelbridge this afternoon or



to-morrow, and will take charge of my letter for me."

Had they been alone, it is possible that the hint might have been taken, and Lennox might have pledged himself to ride over on the morrow ; but, as usual, he was at Isabella's side, and he saw her eye fixed upon him, as much as to say, "How can you let yourself fall into so evident a trap?" and he determined not to commit himself.

"I should have been delighted to have been your Mercury," said he ; "but as I presume that certainty of delivery is a greater object with you than the saving of a penny, I should recommend you to entrust the precious missive to the care of Her Majesty's Postmaster-General ; for my movements are, I fear, very uncertain, and your sister has been talking of a plan for to-morrow which may prove incompatible with my riding to Shelbridge at all."

"Oh, yes! Susan," put in Isabella ; "for Heaven's sake don't bore Mr. Lennox

about Shelbridge. I had very nearly persuaded him to drive me in a sledge to-morrow to W——, and now you are trying to spoil all my plans ; for it is my only chance, and I should be so disappointed if I lost my drive."

" But can nobody drive you besides Mr. Lennox ?" said Susan.

" No !" replied Isabella, shortly ; adding, however, " I could not trust myself to any one else, for it is very difficult to drive a sledge—is not it, Mr. Lennox ?"

" With horses that are not accustomed to the work, it is sometimes," replied he ; " and, in fact, it is not very easy to drive a tandem at any time."

" You surely are not going in a tandem, Isabella," said Susan ; " I am sure mamma won't allow it."

" Mamma will allow it, then, for I've asked her !" replied Isabella, triumphantly ; " and, what's more, she's coming with us herself ; and a jolly party we shall be, if you don't spoil all the sport by putting it

into Mr. Lennox's head that he *must* go to Shelbridge !”

Susan sighed deeply, and returned to her writing-table. She felt that there was no hope, and that she must frame her letter as best she could under the circumstances. She determined, however, to say everything in her power to extenuate the conduct of Lennox, and make it appear, as far as possible, the result of inevitable necessity. She thought that in this way she should, at any rate, spare Louisa much present pain, and smooth the way for a return to a happier state of things, should Lennox meet her under more favourable circumstances. In this way, too, she should gratify her desire of testifying her gratitude to Lennox, as she knew that this was precisely what he would wish her to write ; and the only difficulty now remaining was, therefore, to find a valid and convincing reason why Lennox, having been in the neighbourhood four whole days, could not find one on which to ride over and see her, whom he professed to regard

above all others. She pondered for some time, and at length, acting on the good old principle that, "if one begins to write words will come of themselves," she determined to make a start, and began as follows :—

MY VERY DEAREST LOUISA,

You will, doubtless, have been expecting to hear from me for some days past, but I have been deferring writing in the hope that Mr. Lennox would have been the bearer of my note. He arrived quite safe and well on Monday, and his first words to me were about you, and he seemed most anxious to ride over and pay you a visit. Circumstances, however, have been dreadfully unpropitious to his desires, poor man. In the first place, the weather has been dreadful, and it would have been hardly safe for him to have ridden. Indeed, one great cause of his not coming was that, not having a horse of his own here, and mamma being, as you know, very particular about hers, he

did not like to take one out on a day when he might, very probably, have been unable to keep it on its legs ; and he always hoped that the next day might be more propitious. But another great reason why he has been unable to do so is, that we are rather short of young men here just now, and he is—as I daresay you can easily believe—decidedly the *best*. To-day, I believe, he fully meant to have gone, but, if he had, there would have been no one to shoot with Mr. Thornton ; and mamma seemed so annoyed at this, that he at once gave up his own pleasure to facilitate her arrangements. I fear that the same, or a similar reason, will prevent his coming over to you to-morrow, and he returns to town on Saturday ; so that I am afraid it is not at all impossible that he will be obliged to leave this part of the country without accomplishing the object which, I am sure, was his great inducement in coming into it. It is very hard upon him, and many other people would not have submitted so quietly to the deprivation of such a pleasure ; but

you know how considerate he is, and he could not bear that mamma should be annoyed and her arrangements interfered with merely to gratify his own selfish enjoyments, for, of course you know, darling, neither he nor mamma can possibly know that you care much about the matter—for, although *I* can *guess* that you will be a *little* disappointed, you must remember that they are not in your secrets as I am. He, poor man, probably thinks that it is only himself who is disappointed ; while, I am sure, if mamma knew how much depended on his having one ride by himself, she would not have thrown so many obstacles in his path. So do not be very unhappy, my own dear friend ; think how much worse it might have been if I had had to tell you that he never thought about you, or about seeing you at all ; and still hope that some more favourable opportunity may present itself, when these untoward circumstances will not interfere to prevent your enjoying one another's society. And now I must say adieu ! I

**know** that your little head is just at present **so** full of a certain person on a visit here, **that** it would be useless to tell you about **any** of the rest of the party. So with **my** very tenderest love, believe me to be **always**

Your loving Friend,

SUSAN.

“There!” thought Susan, as she read **Over** her letter, “I think I have done **pretty** well for my friend, Mr. Lennox; **and**, though he did save my life, I think, **if** he knew all, he would consider the debt **pretty** well repaid.”

As she finished directing the letter, she **saw** that Lennox, who had come to the **table** for a pen, was looking wistfully at the **address**. A momentary gleam of hope shot through her. “Once more, Mr. Lennox, before I put the stamp on, do you refuse to be my messenger?”

“Indeed, Miss Vernon,” said he gravely, “it is with the greatest pain that I do so. You

may easily imagine that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be the bearer of your note. But you see how I am situated. It is impossible for me to do so without being absolutely rude to Mrs. Vernon, and disappointing your sister of a desire, on which she has set her heart. It would be very selfish of me to vex them in order to afford myself the pleasure of paying a visit to Miss Castleton."

And Lennox, as he said these words, looked as if he considered himself a perfect model of self denial.

It was of course impossible for Susan to say she thought there was another, who took as much interest in the matter as himself, and whose wishes he was even more bound to consult, so she only replied—

"Well, Mr. Lennox, I am very sorry for you; but I have given you a very good character here, and I have told Louisa of the concatenation of unfortunate circumstances, which have prevented you from paying your respects to her."



“Have you indeed !—nay, that was very kind of you,” replied he, “for I should be sorry that Miss Castleton thought me deficient in respect and attention, which she might very fairly have done, if she had not known all the circumstances, and indeed I am very grateful to you.”

And so indeed he was—for he was far from being indifferent to Louisa’s good opinion of him, and he could not help thinking that she might consider him rather remiss. But now everything was settled satisfactorily. He had enjoyed himself very much, flirting with Isabella, and he had, by Susan’s means, obtained an antidote against any ill effects that might ensue on the side of Miss Castleton.

He gave himself up therefore with renewed ardour to the fascinations of Isabella, and Susan, as she set opposite to them at dinner, trembled lest she had done amiss in lulling Louisa into a false security. “Can this man really be so inconstant?” she said to herself. But then the character of her

sister prevented her pronouncing his condemnation at once. She knew that she was well known to be a flirt, and she thought that Lennox, who knew her well, might therefore consider her as fair game, and so amuse himself with her, while his heart was really given to another. Still she felt very uncomfortable, and she was heartily glad that there was only one day more, and that then this visit, to which she had looked forward with so much pleasure, would arrive at its termination.

The following day was bright and sunny—the high roads were pretty well beaten, and were pronounced in very good order for sledging, and Isabella's plan was carried out as she had intended. They drove into W——, she seated on the driving seat by Lennox, while her mother and an elderly gentleman, who was taken as a makeweight, filled the larger seat behind. They met with no particular adventures. Lennox drove well, the horses trotted freely and rapidly over the hardened

now, and nothing occurred to vary the ameness of the drive, save that at the entrance of a lane that diverged from the high road, the fluttering covering of a gipsy's tent made the horses swerve, and had well nigh upset the vehicle, when, as Lennox, having brought back the animals to the right track, turned his head to look at the object that so alarmed them, he saw the well-remembered face of the gipsy girl, her features lit up by a sarcastic smile, and her outstretched arm pointed at the sledge, he could not at that distance tell whether particularly at himself or at his companion.

“Wonderful,” he thought, “how that girl haunts me, and the interest she appears to take in my affairs. Why was she pointing and laughing at me? Last time I saw her she seemed to warn and threaten me, and now she appears almost as if she were exulting over me.”

Occupied with these reflections he remained moody and silent for some minutes, till being rallied by his fair companion on his

abstraction, he aroused himself with an effort, and touching up his leader with the point of his long tandem-whip, he dashed on as if the rapidity of the pace would banish thought, and leave all care behind.

And thus ended the last day at Moor Park. The following morning he took his departure immediately after breakfast, and was soon rapidly gliding along on the railroad to London.

"After all, he has not been to Shelbridge," said Isabella to herself, exulting in the success of her plans.

"After all, he has not been to Shelbridge," thought Susan with a deep sigh. "I only hope and trust that we have now seen the worst, and that his visit to us, which I had looked forward to so much, may not have been productive of far more evil than good."

And with a heavy heart she quitted the drawing-room.

END OF VOL. II.

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**FERDINAND CASTLETON.**

**A NOVEL.**

**"A Christian is the highest style of man."—YOUNG.**

**IN THREE VOLUMES.**

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# FERDINAND CASTLETON.

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## PART IV.

*(Continued.)*

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### CHAPTER IV.

WHILE these events had been taking place at Moor Park, the non-arrival of any intelligence of Lennox had kept poor Louisa Castleton in a dreadful state of suspense. She knew that he was to be at Mrs. Vernon's on the Monday, and her heart whispered to her that it was just possible that he might contrive to make his way over there on the following day. When, however, Tuesday's sun was set, and no Lennox had appeared, she consoled herself with the reflection that it might, very possibly, have been impossible for him to abscond himself from the party at Moor Park.

on the first day after his arrival ; in fact, she tried to persuade herself that she had never expected him. She made sure, however, that he would certainly make his appearance on Wednesday ; and, with a pardonable impulse of vanity, she put on her most becoming dress and arranged her hair with peculiar care, in the way that she had more than once heard him admire, in order that she might appear to the best advantage in the eyes of him who was all the world to her. The fast-falling snow, indeed, admonished her that it was possible that he might be prevented ; but, judging his feelings by her own, she did not think it likely that a snow storm would prevent his making his way over the few miles that separated Shelbridge from Moor Park. She thought he would, probably, come to luncheon ; but when luncheon-time arrived, and he appeared not, she settled that he had waited in hopes of the weather clearing up, which she regretted, as it would necessarily shorten his visit, as she could not allow him to remain late enough to be benighted on his ride home. But still he came not ; and as the dreary



day faded into still drearier twilight, poor Louisa's hopes faded also, and, with a heavy heart, as the servant brought in candles, she resigned herself to the conviction that there was no chance for her for this day. She wondered rather that she had not heard from Susan. Perhaps, after all, he had never arrived—some accident might have happened. Those horrid railways, again!—he might even now be perishing, or laid up with broken limbs at some obscure railway-station. These painful visions, combining with her other sources of uneasiness, caused her to pass a restless night, and most gladly did she welcome the returning day, which dawned brilliantly, as if determined to compensate for the dulness of its predecessor. "At least, the weather will not detain him to-day," she said to herself; "and I sincerely hope the post will bring me a letter from Susan." In this latter hope she was doomed to be disappointed—no letter from Moor Park greeted her anxious eyes when she descended to the breakfast-room. She consoled herself, however, with the belief that Susan would certainly have written

had anything been amiss, and flattered herself with the fond hope that Susan had *not* written, because Mr. Lennox was certainly coming over himself.

Mr. Castleton himself was rather anxious. He knew of Lennox being in the neighbourhood, and was desirous that he should come over, both because he wanted to see him, and because, from what he had heard of the proceedings at Stapleford Castle, he considered it a compliment that was no more than his daughter's due.

"Have you any letter from Susan?" he enquired of his daughter.

"No, dear papa," she replied; "and I am rather surprised that I have not; it is long since I have heard from her."

"Perhaps she means to send it by private hand," rejoined Mr. Castleton, with an arch smile.

Louisa blushed deeply, but only replied—

"Mr. Lennox certainly promised that he would ride over and pay us a visit from Moor Park; but the weather, I suppose, has prevented him."

"Well, it will not prevent him to-day,

I should think, for it is beautiful for the time of year. I hope you have got luncheon enough for a hungry traveller, for I have no doubt there will be one to partake of it with us."

Louisa thought so, too ; but she became now doubly anxious for his arrival, for, as even her father evidently expected him, she could not but feel his non-appearance as rather a slight upon herself. Luncheon time, nevertheless, arrived, and no Lennox ; and poor Louisa, though she did her utmost to appear cheerful and unconcerned, could hardly restrain her tears. Her hopes were now growing fainter and fainter, still, when her father proposed a walk, she looked so dismayed at the idea of throwing away even a chance, that he good-naturedly declined to press the proposition, and remained at home with her until the deepening shadows warned them that the short winter's day was, indeed, at an end, and with it all hopes of seeing Charles Lennox. He then, saying that he had some poor people in the village that he must go and see, but that it was now too late for Louisa to accompany him.

put on his hat and great coat and quitted the house.

As he walked away towards the village he meditated, and the more he meditated the more was he disquieted, and, with disquietude came an emotion more resembling anger than he had for a long time experienced. To trifle with his daughter's affections was an offence not easily forgiven, even by Ferdinand Castleton! It is true he knew not the precise extent to which their intimacy had gone at Stapleford, but he had heard enough to know that more than ordinary attention had been paid by the gentleman, and what he had seen of Louisa's manner during the last day or two had shown him that a more than ordinary interest had been excited on the part of the lady. He thought of his own youth, and reflected that, had he been within six or eight miles of the object of his affections, it would have required more than a snow storm or an icy road to have detained him from her side. As he walked, the wind sighed mournfully through the trees, and whirled before it such withered leaves as the autumnal

and wintry gales had hitherto spared ; the sound was in unison with his troubled spirit, and pensive and musing he walked sadly on, till the sound of a horse's foot advancing rapidly over the snow fell upon his ear. Could it possibly be he, striving even at this late hour to atone for past neglect ? His heart beat quickly ; but as the figure emerged from the shade of the trees, and, passing close by him, stood out in relief against the clear sky, he saw it was only a neighbouring farmer returning from market, who, with a cheery " Good night, sir !" passed on, on his way homewards.

His eye, however, in the endeavour to scan the horseman's features, had been cast upward, and the pale blue of the sky, through which many a star now began to twinkle, had such a charm for him that he continued for some time to gaze upon it. All there was so tranquil, so peaceful—the gusty breeze that sighed among the trees and scattered the leaves down below, had no influence there.

" Truly, thrice happy are they who are early removed from the toils and troubles

of this weary life," said he to himself—  
" If they at all behold this sublunary scene—  
they gaze upon it, as unmoved by the pas—  
sions and emotions which agitate us here—  
below, as those stars by the currents of air—  
which are tossing about these leaves, happy  
in the appreciation of the infinite wisdom,  
and clearly seeing how all that is, is best ;  
for if they are conscious of what happens  
in this world, they must be endued with  
that exquisite appreciation of the Divine  
purposes, else would the misery they would  
be compelled to witness be an alloy to their  
otherwise uninterrupted felicity. But if  
they by their knowledge can thus look  
upon all human events, as being directed  
by the will of God for our ultimate hap—  
piness, so may we by our faith even in this  
our imperfect state. To thy hands, there—  
fore, O heavenly Father, do I commend  
the welfare and happiness of my beloved  
daughter, so far, so very far more import—  
ant in my eyes than my own—and con—  
fidently do I trust that thou wilt so order  
all things, that they shall eventually work  
to her and our benefit."

Cheered and consoled by thoughts such

as these, Ferdinand walked rapidly on to the village, and there, by his presence and valued conversation, cheered many an aching heart, and gladdened many a weary spirit.

But poor Louisa, less able to bear up against trial, and naturally feeling the present one most acutely, when she had seen her father depart, threw herself on a sofa, covered her face with her hands, and burst into a passion of tears. It was not grief, still less was it anger, that made them flow. It was suspense, and vexation of spirit, and worry of mind, which, when all cause for constraint was removed, found a vent in the overflowing eyelids. A well-known and direct misfortune she fancied she could have better borne ; but it was the not knowing what to think, the uncertainty as to whether Lennox was blameable or unfortunate, or both, or neither—whether his apparent neglect arose from causes beyond his own control, or from his having become really careless about her, that harassed her so much. She found great relief, however, in her tears, and after a time began to think she had

been very foolish in giving way to them, and determined that her father on his return should discern no traces of them. She remembered his oft-repeated advice—that employment was the best defence against mental annoyance of every description, and accordingly she zealously occupied herself with a book of much interest, that she was engaged upon, and succeeded so well in diverting her thoughts, that her father on his return was both surprised and pleased at her cheerfulness.

The following morning, with unfeigned delight, Louisa seized upon Susan's letter; and although it held out little or no hopes of her seeing Lennox, it gave such satisfactory reasons for his non-appearance, that her mind was relieved of its heavy burden, and she was as much delighted as if—two days before—she had been told he was actually on his way to see her. How comparative is all joy and sorrow in this world! The receipt of a letter, which two days ago would have overwhelmed her with disappointment, now caused her the liveliest emotions of pleasure, so gloomy in the interim had been her



anticipations of evil. In the joy of her heart she showed the letter to her father, although it spoke rather more freely of the interest she took in Lennox than she had ever herself ventured to do to him—and Mr. Castleton, though he thought that a little resolution might have overcome the obstacles spoken of, and that if there had been rather more “will,” the “way” might have been found not quite so impracticable, was nevertheless so pleased to see his daughter happy, that he was fain to be content with Susan’s assurances that Lennox’s absence was indeed almost unavoidable, and as far as it was at all in his own power, was owing to his own unselfishness, and his great consideration for the comfort and convenience of Mrs. Vernon and her guests.

He reflected, besides, that, after all, he had no right to suppose that Lennox’s feelings towards Louisa, even although he had paid her marked attention, were at all resembling those which he had felt in his own days of courtship. Their intercourse, after all, had been limited to a fortnight, and it was not therefore to be expected

that, in so short a time, Lennox should have become as completely devoted an admirer as he himself had been after an acquaintance of a very much longer duration. He, therefore, felt that he had no right to expect that Lennox should be so ready to make a sacrifice for the sake of seeing Louisa, and he only fervently hoped that his daughter's passion for Lennox had not taken a far deeper root than his for her. He thought, however, that it would be as well for all parties if he could be informed clearly how matters stood ; and as he shrunk from questioning his daughter, whose delicacy would be hurt, even if her feelings were not affected, he settled that he would endeavour to see Lady Barbara, who was again staying at Stapleford, and ascertain from her what she thought of the whole affair. With Ferdinand little time elapsed between forming a determination and acting upon it ; and as Lennox, as we know, did not make his appearance on the Friday, and Saturday proved a fine though frosty day, he and Louisa got into the phæton, and drove over to luncheon at Stapleford Castle.

## CHAPTER V.

At luncheon, Ferdinand took an opportunity of leaving Louisa with her grandmother, while he offered his sister his arm ; saying he wanted to speak to her privately ; they paced up and down a broad sunny terrace, where they could converse without interruption.

"I wanted to ask you, Barbara," said the precise nature of the little love or flirtation, or whatever it is to be, between my Louisa and that young man. I will tell you candidly what I have to ask the question. He has been going lately at Moor Park, and we rather expected that he would have come over to

was not quite so much convinced as she was, of the impracticability of his doing so ; and, in fact, I have been seriously uneasy lest he should have been trifling with her, and have inspired a passion, or, at any rate a *liking* for himself, stronger than he himself feels for her. I want, therefore, to know your opinion on the matter, as it all passed before your eyes—how far you think he cares for her, and how deep a sentiment she feels for him ?”

“ Well, Ferdinand, I will try and answer your last question first, which I can the more readily do, as she has never made me her confidante ; and, therefore, I am betraying no secrets. Though, after all, it is a delicate thing to unveil the depths of a young lady’s heart even to her father.”

“ Ah ! but, Barbara, you must remember that my poor child has no mother. I am father and mother both ; and it is in my maternal capacity,” he pursued with a faint smile, “ that I implore you to tell me the truth.”

“ Indeed I will, dear brother,” replied Lady Barbara, moved by the melancholy

of his tone ; “and you shall know as much as I do. I fear, however, that you may not be pleased ; for, I must confess, I am very sincerely convinced that our darling Louisa is very much attached to this young man.”

“It is, then, as I feared,” replied he. “But how could she have lost her heart in so short a time ?”

“The time was short, indeed, but the opportunities were many. He devoted himself to her ; and inexperienced, and just entering upon life as she was, the homage was grateful to her, and she fell an easy victim.”

“But when you saw all this going on, why, in heaven’s name, did you not put a stop to it ?”

“Simply, because I thought, and think still, in spite of the apparent neglect that you mention, that there was no harm being done. I believed that he had really conceived an attachment for her. I knew him to be a good kind of man, and the heir to a peerage ; and I, therefore, did not see any reason why I should discourage an affair that promised well for the happiness of both parties.”

“ I fear, however,” replied her brother, “ that you miscalculated the extent of his affection ; and what to him was the amusement of a passing hour, has ruined my child’s happiness for life.”

“ Nay, nay, dear brother, do not think thus. I think it is just possible that I may have a little over-rated the durability of the impression which Louisa made upon him ; but I am quite sure of this, that when once they are brought together again, she will resume and confirm her empire over him. And this brings me to *my* business with *you* ; for I was as anxious to speak to you, as you seem to have been to consult me. I want you to let me take Louisa to town with me, and give her the benefit of a London season. What do you say to it?”

“ No ! no ! a thousand times no !” replied Ferdinand. “ Believe me, dear Barbara, I am quite sensible of your kind intentions, but, indeed, I should be very sorry that my precious child should be exposed to the ordeal of a London season. Her tastes and pursuits are those which belong to a country life, to which she has

een accustomed, and which will, probably, be her lot for the future ; and, I think, we should be doing her a world of harm, without affording her any real enjoyment, by allowing her to taste of that toxicating draught which so many drain to their own destruction."

"Well, but listen to me for a few minutes, and I think you will, perhaps, be induced to change your determination. In the first place, by taking her to town, she would again meet with Charles Lennox, when I will make any wager he will be at her feet in no time."

"I confess, Barbara, I am surprised at your urging such a reason. I trust that your daughter is not yet reduced to the necessity of hunting up a lover, who does not trouble himself to come and look after her."

"Pray don't be angry, Ferdinand ; she is not hunting up a lover, merely because she goes to town to be presented on first coming out. Only, if her heart is really set to him, it is as well that she should have an opportunity of completing the conquest of his, a conquest already more

just as cogent had he never must sometimes have the probability that exists of continuing childless, and frequently you, and after you may, very possibly, become all this property; and Louisa Castleton, heiress of this vast domain, can live in the same peaceful was so agreeable to the of Miss Castleton, of She

“If it pleases God to darling child should be to different a sphere from the adorns, it would, doubtless almost necessary that she different mode of living. cerely do I hope and pr



“There are few younger brothers who would join you in such a wish,” replied Lady Barbara, laughing. “However, I fully believe you are sincere, and I even allow that you know best what is for your own happiness ; but I confess I should like to see Louisa raised to a station to which she is so well calculated to be an ornament.”

“Carry your faith in my discernment one step farther, Barbara, and believe that I know best what is for my child’s happiness, as well as for my own. You know I have tried the world, and I have tried retirement, and believe me, the pleasures that the world can give are as nothing compared to those which arise from a consciousness of fulfilling, imperfectly though it be, one’s duties in a humble station.”

“It may be so,” replied she ; “I confess I never tried the comparison. But remember, Ferdinand, that when you sought retirement, it was with a wounded spirit and a broken heart, and that one in the heyday of youthful spirits, one who has never yet known grief or affliction, might think differently ; but, however,

it is needless to argue the question ; for neither you nor I can alter the decrees of fate ; and if it is destined that Abbotsham shall have no children, you must become Lord Stapleford, whether you like it or not, provided you live long enough ; and after your death, your only daughter must become the mistress of all this property, and then you yourself admit she will have duties to discharge, which will not admit of her continuing in that state of retirement and seclusion which you praise so highly. The real question is then, whether, seeing that such a contingency is more than probable, it would not be as well to prepare Louisa for the station she may in time be called upon to occupy, by introducing her into that society in which she will then move, and accustoming her to that life of gaiety, in which she will then be required to take her part."

"Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," replied Ferdinand. "Surely, surely, it will be time enough to introduce 'the Lady Louisa' into society, when 'Miss Castleton' has ceased to exist."

"But have you never observed, brother

mine, that there are no people who are more outrageously extravagant in their gaiety, and who push their enjoyment of excitement to a greater extent, than those who have been somewhat late in life suddenly introduced to a sphere to which they have not been accustomed; while those who have been early inured to such scenes, speedily lose any excessive relish for them, and subside into quiet, sensible married women—like me.” she added with a smile.

Ferdinand smiled too; his sister’s idea of “a quiet, sensible, married woman” was so different from his own. He only said, however,—

“What you say is doubtless true; but I think that if we knew the secret history of those quietly brought up people, who have afterwards become so wild, we should find that there was some great flaw in their education, and that the retirement of their early life had been submitted to rather than enjoyed. But, in Louisa’s case, I trust the foundation has been too well laid to permit of the building being overturned by any change in fortune’s gales, however sudden or overpowering.”

“ But if, then,” pursued Lady Barbara, “ you consider Louisa so safe from being injured by being suddenly brought forward in society, in what you admit to be a *disadvantageous* manner, why do you fear that any harm should befall her, when she is merely ‘brought out’ in the natural way, and under circumstances of no peculiar difficulty or temptation ?”

“ I do not *think* that any serious harm would accrue to Louisa’s mind, but I fear that it might ; and I do not wish her to be *thrown* into temptation unnecessarily. Besides, if Louisa were the sole representative of her family, she would feel the importance of the high duties that would devolve upon her, and that feeling would in itself be a safeguard. Whereas, if she now entered the world, she would think herself but a painted butterfly, fluttering in your train, with no higher object in view but mere amusement. In the case supposed, her duties would be *in* the world, and she would feel them to be so, and play her part in the world accordingly. Now, her duties lie *out* of the world ; and were she to enter the world now, it would

not for duty but for pleasure—and pleasure, pursued for its own sake, is like the evanescent rainbow, which the nearer we reach, the further it flies from us.”

Yet you were happy in the world, Ferdinand ; and, pardon me if I distress you, your lost Louisa was both a denizen of the world, and one of its most distinguished ornaments.”

My precious wife,” rejoined Ferdinand, “is, indeed, a rare instance of one who, flattered and courted by the world of fashion, as you say, she was one of the brightest ornaments, was yet unstained and uncontaminated by it. But she, though of the world, was not *of* the world. Her heart was never given up to it ; and I have never heard her say, that the happiest moment of her residence in London was the moment on which she stepped into the carriage to quit it. I am speaking now of the time before we were married. During the most tranquil and happy period that followed, though we did not give up society entirely, our hearts were both of them too fully engrossed with one another, to be in any danger of their being too

much occupied with the vanities of the world. And you know that, for a long time before we were married—in fact, nearly for the whole of Louisa's London life—her heart was more or less given up to me, and thereby secured from the influence of other interests."

"In that respect, then, Louisa resembles her mother," put in Lady Barbara; thinking, that now, at least, she had got a "coign of vantage."

"Aye, if we were sure of Mr. Lennox. In fact, if Louisa were engaged to him, and their marriage were only deferred for a time, I should not so much object to her being introduced to that society to which, as his wife, she would belong. But suppose, after all, Lennox plays her false; could anything be more likely to incline a girl to plunge into dissipation, and seek relief from the pangs of a wounded heart in the excitement of the admiration which, beautiful as Louisa is, she would be sure to excite, than the feeling that she was not appreciated, when most she would desire to be so? No, no, Barbara, I have listened to your arguments, and am still

nconvinced ; and, see here is my little darling coming, so let us change the subject."

Lady Barbara, however, did not feel inclined to let the subject drop so readily. She was very anxious to gain her point, and felt very much provoked at the manner in which Ferdinand had disposed of all her arguments. She determined, therefore, as a last effort, to call in Louisa's own wishes to her aid ; and acting only on the impulse of the moment, and heedless of the mischief she might do, she called out to Louisa, as the latter advanced towards them—

"Come here, my dear, and help me to persuade your naughty papa to let you come to London with me. I have been trying this last half hour, but he is inexorable."

Ferdinand felt beyond expression annoyed at his sister's having thus indiscreetly divulged the subject of their conversation, and thus put into Louisa's head plans that were never to be realized, and wishes that were not to be fulfilled. He said, therefore, with a sternness of manner quite unusual to him—

" Louisa, I trust, knows better than to attempt to persuade her father to consent to any plan that he does not think likely to conduce to her welfare or happiness."

At the mention of going to London the thought of again meeting Lennox had glanced through Louisa's mind like a meteor, and her eyes sparkled ; but, as she saw her father's countenance, and heard his words, her hopes died away within her, and, in spite of herself, a shade of disappointment crossed her countenance, though she immediately smiled and said, putting her hand within her father's—

" My dear papa knows how implicitly I rely on his judgment in all things."

Ferdinand fondly clasped the little hand that lay within his ; but he had marked the changes of her countenance, and, without speaking, he sighed deeply.

Lady Barbara, indignant at seeing her last hope of overcoming Ferdinand's opposition thus disappointed, quitted the terrace abruptly, and left the father and daughter alone together.

There was a pause of some moments, after which Mr. Castleton said, in a voice



as gentle as if he had indeed been the mother, whose place he considered himself as supplying—

“ Are you really so much grieved, my darling child, at my objecting to allow you to go through the ordeal of a London season under your aunt’s care ? I know you did not *say* that you were, but you *looked* so.”

“ I must keep my looks in better order then, papa, and not let them tell such tales, but it was only for an instant ; and, indeed, I am very well contented to stay with you, and I am sure that you know what is best for me, and are always anxious to anticipate my wishes, if they are innocent ones.”

“ But what makes you have such a desire to go to London, child ? you always used to wonder how people could be happy there, and how any one could be willing to be absent from the country during the time of the year when it is in its greatest beauty ?”

“ Only because I enjoyed myself very much when I was here before,” replied Louisa, blushing deeply ; “ and I thought that if I were in town with aunt Barbara,

I should have a repetition of the same amusement. But I dare say I should not like it so well, when I came to try it; and, at any rate, I am well contented to abide by your opinion, who know so much more about it than I do."

Mr. Castleton did not press the subject farther; but he was much disquieted in his mind, and was more than usually silent during the drive home. After his return, he pondered much and anxiously on all that had passed, weighing carefully the arguments brought forward by Lady Barbara, as well as those that arose spontaneously in his own mind, that he might convince himself whether or not it was advisable to revoke the refusal that he had given to his sister's offer. It often happens, that, when we are discussing a question, we feel quite sure of being in the right, though afterwards, if we resolve the matter in our own minds, the arguments of our opponents appear of a far more convincing nature than we had at first deemed them to be. It was so in this case. When he was arguing the matter with his sister, Ferdinand felt no more doubt as to the cor-

rectness of his own view of the case than he did of that of the multiplication table ; and it would have been almost as easy to persuade him that twice two no longer made four, as to convince him that it was advisable that Louisa should be allowed to appear in London society. In his own solitary chamber, however, the arguments of his sister obtained a force that at first had been entirely wanting.

It certainly was very true, he thought, that it was extremely probable that Louisa might one day be a great lady, and that no wishes on his part could avert that occurrence. And, if she were destined ultimately to play her part in the great world, there were many reasons why it was as well that she should learn to do so at an early age ; and he certainly had that confidence in the soundness of her education, that he did not believe that any permanent injury would accrue from a temporary indulgence in a little dissipation ; and the case of her mother was exactly in point—and for her memory Ferdinand had that intense veneration, that he could not bear to think that anything that she had

done would have been better left undone. But, besides, there were two other considerations that had very great weight in inducing him to alter his determination—the one was Louisa's evident wish to accept her aunt's offer, which, although she had so nobly suppressed it, had only the more excited his sympathy; for although she could not openly confess that her anxiety to see Lennox again was the cause of her wish, her father divined the real reason but too truly. He feared that she had very much lost her heart to this young man; and if that were the case, and her happiness depended in any manner on his returning her affection, there certainly was a good deal of truth in what Lady Barbara had said about the policy of giving her an opportunity of resuming her influence over him. He felt that he should never forgive himself if any mistaken firmness on his part had injured the happiness of his darling child; and her ready resignation to his wishes, on a point on which her own were so deeply interested, impelled him even more to give way to them.

The second consideration that caused

him to waver was, that he felt how much his own comfort and happiness were involved in the question; and he dreaded lest, unknown to himself, his natural desire to retain his daughter with him should unduly bias his judgment. He had felt this once before to a certain extent, when the question only was—whether or not he should permit his daughter to join the gay doings at Stapleford Castle?—but that was only a brief separation, and he was therefore then comparatively disinterested. But now—to lose her for three whole months—how could one who had so large a stake be qualified to play the part of umpire. He could not, however, help wishing, most heartily, that the said visit to Stapleford had never taken place. His daughter would then never have met with Lennox, and half, at least, of his troubles would have been removed. What was past, however, could not be helped, and, perhaps, after all, it was best as it was—for this Lennox seemed, by all accounts, to be in the main a good kind of man; and if his acquaintance with Louisa were renewed, and resulted in their marriage, he

might, perhaps, be more calculated to ensure her happiness than another. But how could the acquaintance be renewed, unless she was permitted to go to town? The contingency to which he had alluded in his discussion with his sister, that Lennox might, after all, play her false, did certainly occur to him; but Lady Barbara had appeared so convinced of the extent of the influence which Louisa possessed over him, and he himself was so well aware of her numerous attractions, that he thought there was no very great danger of that. He never for an instant imagined that Lennox was watching the turn of events, that he might see whether Louisa was likely to be a great fortune or not. He still thought the contingency far from probable, and, at all events, so remote, that no one could build upon it; and, not knowing how very poor Lord Lennox was, he imagined that, at any rate, he would be satisfied with the portion that he could give his daughter, which, as she was his only child, would be, in any event, no inconsiderable one. He came at last, therefore, to view matters in a very dif-

ferent light from that in which they had appeared when the subject was first mentioned to him, and to consider it as the natural course of things that Louisa should go to London—should meet with Lennox,—should complete her conquest of him, accept his proposal, and be united to him in the course of the year. He sighed as he thought of this last event; it would be a cruel separation for him, but was it not for her happiness? He finally determined, therefore, to revoke his decision—to stifle every selfish feeling, calm every lingering fear, and entrust his beloved child to the care of her aunt during a separation, which he both hoped and feared, was but a prelude to one yet longer and more complete. He was not himself aware how much his judgment was biassed by his fondness for his child and his unwillingness to cause her pain. That look had sunk deep into his breast, and he pictured to himself with delight the joy that would be depicted in her countenance when he informed her of the alteration which had taken place in his opinion.

He resolved not to mention the subject

for a day or two, that he might again revert to his original decision, if any more potent arguments occurred to his mind in the interval. but no change was produced, nor was it likely that any should, when his thoughts were running all the time on the joyful surprise that he was preparing for Lucia.

At length he resolved no longer to defer their mutual pleasure, and accordingly said to his daughter—

— My darling, I have been thinking over your aunt's project for taking you to town, and I begin to think that I was somewhat hasty in so decidedly negativing it. I have now lived so long in the country that I believe I had come to look upon the London world as more full of temptations than it really is. At any rate, I have that confidence in you, my own precious one, that I do not fear your acquiring too great a taste for dissipation. And it is but natural that you should like to enjoy the pleasures suitable to your years, and to the station that you may one day occupy. So I have made up my mind to write to your aunt to request her to overlook my



refusal, and to take charge of you according to her own kind proposal.

This news was so entirely unexpected, and filled Louisa's heart with such unbounded delight, that she was almost overcome, and could only press her father's hand, and, while her eyes filled with tears, say in a low voice, "My good, kind papa." She knew the sacrifice he was making in parting from her, and though she had not the heart to refuse it, she deeply appreciated it nevertheless; and Ferdinand was not disappointed of the pleasure he had expected in seeing her happiness. From that moment he never permitted any misgiving as to the wisdom of his decision to interfere with his satisfaction in having gratified his dear daughter's wishes. And the note to Lady Barbara being written, and an answer received, which expressed her unbounded delight at the change in his opinions, it was finally and definitively settled that in a few short weeks Louisa Castleton should make her *début* in the London world.

## PART V.

## THE SEASON.

## CHAPTER I.

THREE months had elapsed since Ferdinand had arrived at the eventful decision, that LAURA should have the benefit of a London season: and the time had now arrived when it was to be carried into effect and she was to be separated for a long space from her paternal roof, and launched upon the wide world with no better guidance than that which could be furnished by her aunt, Lady Barbara.

These three months, however, had not been by any means barren of events. To Wentworth, at any rate, an event had occurred of the greatest importance. A

good living, in the gift of his uncle, the dean, had unexpectedly fallen vacant ; and, in compliance with his promise, had been offered to Wentworth, by whom it had been accepted. A few months previously, however, it would have been hailed by him with far different feelings. He would then have considered it as supplying the means of laying a formal siege to Louisa's heart, to the successful issue of which—the one thing needful to complete his earthly happiness—he could have looked forward with hope and confidence. Now, however, it was far otherwise ; and while grateful for his good fortune, he could hardly forbear from murmuring that it had not arrived at a period when he considered it would have been so much more useful to him.

He did not, however, hesitate about accepting it. It would give him at once the means of knowing his fate ; he could at once appeal to Louisa herself, and if there seemed to be no hope, the sooner he was finally separated from her, painful though such separation must necessarily be, the better would it prove for his ulti-

mate happiness. He lost no time in speaking to Mr. Castleton on the subject, and asking his opinion as to the line of conduct that it would be best for him to pursue.

"I need not tell you, my dear Wentworth," was Ferdinand's reply, "how very glad I should be if your suit were successful. Now that you have so good a living, the only objection that I could ever have entertained against your marriage with my daughter has been removed, and I could desire nothing better for her happiness than that your suit should be a successful one. At the same time, it is but fair to tell you, that I have very grave doubts of your success, and that I think it but too probable that your formal proposal will subject you to the pain and humiliation of a refusal. Under all the circumstances, however, I think it is best that you should bring matters to a crisis. Were you to leave us now, and go and reside at a distance, without anything definite having passed between you and Louisa, your mind would be perpetually unsettled, and you would be always in a harassing state of suspense ;

while, if you take the leap at once, even if you are unsuccessful, you will be better able to banish the thoughts of her from your mind, by occupying yourself with your new and solemn duties. The other alternative I need not dwell upon. It is fortunate, also, that Louisa being on the point of leaving home, you will both be relieved from the embarrassment of meeting so constantly as you must do if she stayed here ; as you, I suppose, will not leave me for the present."

" Oh no ! I certainly shall not leave you for some time. I should like to remain with you while Miss Castleton is away, that I may in some degree, however imperfectly, supply her place as your companion ; and it will suit in other respects too :—for the widow of the late incumbent of my new living will be very glad to have a few months to make her preparations for leaving ; her husband's death, poor man, having been so sudden and unexpected, that she has probably never even turned in her mind, what is to be her future destination. It is, therefore, as you observe, a fortunate time for my

proposal to be made ; as I presume, if I am successful beyond my hopes, the trip to London will be given up."

"Most assuredly," replied Mr. Castleton ; "were Louisa's destiny now settled by her engagement to become your wife, there would be no reason whatever for her going to town, and the strongest reasons against it."

Mr. Castleton sighed as he spoke, for he thought of the great inducement that had led him to consent to her going to town, the hope of her meeting young Lennox, and he reflected how very little chance the poor young man had, who was now conversing with him, and whom he should have very much preferred for a son-in-law, even had Lennox been an open and acknowledged suitor. But, as circumstances really were, he felt much alarm lest his daughter should be losing the substance while seeking a vain shadow, which would but too probably perpetually elude her grasp.

Regrets, however, were worse than useless. With a fervent prayer, he commended his daughter's welfare to the great

Overruler of all things, and awaited with some anxiety the issue of Wentworth's proposal, which, as it respected the siege of Louisa's heart, may fairly be denominated "the forlorn hope."

An opportunity was not long in offering itself.

They had all three been walking together in the garden, when Ferdinand, giving Wentworth a meaning glance, found a pretext for quitting them, and leaving them *tête-à-tête*. Poor Wentworth, he felt that he had a hard task to perform. Up to this time, although he more than suspected Louisa's attachment to another, he had suffered no interruption in the pleasure of her society. She had no idea of his feelings, and treated him therefore with precisely the same innocent familiarity that had so gladdened his heart in the happy days of old. After this fatal plunge, however, such could no longer be the case. If he was not successful, and, now that it came to the point, he had scarcely one lingering hope that he should be so, there was an end at once of all familiar unconstrained intercourse. He

must be to her as a stranger, or at best as an "esteemed friend;" they would meet rarely, if ever, and then there would always be a *gêne* between them. This day would be the last of the series of happy ones that had marked his residence at Shelbridge. He gave, however, one thought to the bright side of the picture, to nerve himself by thinking of the exquisite happiness he should feel, if her answer were a favourable one; and then, though somewhat at a loss to know how to begin, he endeavoured to lead to the subject by saying—

"How beautiful the country is beginning to look now. Do you not feel any regret at leaving it, to immure yourself in a smoky town, where the place of the beauties of nature is but feebly supplied by those of art?"

"Oh, yes! indeed, Mr. Wentworth, I have many, many regrets, and I have often been inclined to wish that I was not going—both on account of leaving the beautiful country, and of parting from my dear father."

Wentworth sighed. Had she no regret



at parting from *him* ? Reflecting, however, that if she had, she could not well express it, he braced up his courage and prepared for another attack.

“ Your absence will indeed be a severe loss to your father, Miss Castleton, though I am sure, in the sincerity of his wish for your happiness, he will not allow himself to think so ; but there is one other, by whom your loss will be more severely felt even than by him—for there is one who loves you even more devotedly than he does, and who feels that he parts with you now, never more to see you again under the same circumstances.”

Louisa started and blushed—she began to comprehend his meaning ; but she was so completely taken by surprise that she knew not what to say.

Wentworth saw that he was understood ; and feeling that he had now taken the plunge, he went on with more courage.

“ Yes, Miss Castleton, it is true that I have dared to lift my eyes towards you ; and that now that Providence has placed in my hand the means of doing so, I have determined on declaring myself fully, and

ascertaining my fate at once. Oh! Miss Castleton, I have indeed loved you long, deeply and truly; my poverty alone has sealed my lips; that barrier between us is now removed. Tell me, am I too late? Can you give me any hopes that either now, or at any future time, I may be so happy as to feel that I am not utterly indifferent to you?"

It was now necessary for Louisa to reply. A thousand wild thoughts had been rushing through her brain during the conclusion of Wentworth's brief address. She felt deeply pained—she had known him so long, had regarded him with an almost sisterly affection. Had she never known the workings of a deeper passion, she might have mistaken her regard for him for a more tender sentiment, and would probably have yielded, after a time, to his earnest solicitations; but now, she knew what love, real love was—she had felt it once—she felt it still—but it was not for Wentworth: she could not deceive herself. Her heart was another's. But what should she say? she could not tell him so—and yet to refuse him, without some

such unanswerable reason, appeared to her tender heart to be so unkind. She had not settled what to say, when his last words warned her that she must reply.

“Oh, Mr. Wentworth,” she said, “you do not know how unhappy you have made me. I am so very, very sorry to do or say anything to grieve you—and I feel so very much the honour that the—the—regard of such a man as you must be to me—to any woman—and that you should ever be an object of indifference to me is quite impossible—but still I cannot—indeed I cannot say what you wish.”

Wentworth sighed deeply, and faltered out, in a voice broken with emotion—

“And can you hold out no hope that time may work a change in your sentiments?”

“Time! ah, no! I have known you so long, and esteemed you so much, that time could add nothing to my regard for you—while no time could supply the want of that sentiment for you which I so deeply regret that you wish me to feel, as it is so very impossible that I can ever do so.”

Poor Wentworth! He had thought that he was prepared for the worst—he had persuaded himself that he had really no hope—and that the answer he had now received ought to occasion him no disappointment. It was not till the fatal words were spoken, that convinced him but too completely of the utter fruitlessness of his passion, that he perceived how fondly, in spite of himself, he had clung to the hope that it might be requited—how deep had been the roots of that hope, which was now so entirely eradicated. But so it is always with us; however much our reason may assure us that we have no just ground for our hope, we still cling to it with a tenacity that we only discern when it is at length snatched forcibly from our grasp. And well is it for us that it is so. How many grievous calamities does it not assist us in bearing—how many gloomy anticipations are by its aid kept out of sight! Among the changes and chances of this mortal life, hope is our greatest earthly comforter; and even the most pious Christian, though he proudly and rightly looks to faith for his chief

comfort, need not be ashamed to confess that he owes a material refreshment, to the useful though subsidiary aid of the fresh spring of Hope, which rises bubbling and sparkling in the inner depths of the soul, even of the natural man. Hope, sweet smiling Hope, dark and dreary indeed would our existence in this world be without thee !

Dark and dreary indeed did the future then seem to Wentworth. He could hardly contain his emotion sufficiently to enable him to utter any articulate words. He took Louisa's hand, however, raised it devoutly to his lips, and having imprinted upon it the first and only kiss that it would ever receive from him, he pressed it warmly within his own, and said, in a low voice—

“ Farewell then, Miss Castleton ! forgive me if I have distressed you—you will shortly be leaving this place ; and among the new scenes and new faces by which you will be surrounded, you will soon forget aught that is painful in connection with poor William Wentworth. I am obliged to leave this to-morrow, and shall

not return till after your departure, when I am to come and stay here to be a companion to Mr. Castleton during your absence. On your return I shall finally quit this scene of my greatest happiness, and establish myself in my new abode. It may, therefore, and most probably it will, be long ere we meet again. May Heaven's choicest blessings be showered down on your head, and may you in your future life be as happy as I wish, and as you deserve. Once more, farewell !”

And with an ardent pressure of the hand, he turned away with a rapid stride, and was gone !

As the sound of his retiring footsteps died away, Louisa sank on a seat that was close by, and covering her face with her hands, burst into a flood of tears. She could not wish to undo what she had done, or to unsay what she had said ; but she did feel most deeply grieved at what had passed between them. For Wentworth was no common acquaintance—no ordinary admirer. He was the friend of her youth, almost of her childhood—her constant, almost daily companion. She had loved

him as a brother, and had never suspected that he had loved her other than as a sister, and now she was to be separated from him, perhaps for ever; for she knew enough of his character to appreciate the depth of his attachment, and she felt sure that his feelings would never admit of their former intimacy being renewed. She was sorry then for her own loss, and exquisitely grieved at having been compelled to cause him so much pain.

“ Oh ! Mr. Wentworth,” she thought, “ why ! oh, why were you not contented with my sincere friendship, esteem, regard, nay, even affection ? Why would you long for the only sentiment that it was not in my power to feel for you ?—why did you not love Susan and not me ? Oh ! how delightful that would have been ! then I should, indeed, have felt that I had gained a brother and a sister.”

Here her reflections were interrupted by her father, who had met Wentworth as he was leaving the garden, and learnt at a glance the true state of the case. With a silent grasp of the hand he had let him pass

on, and had now come to see after his daughter.

He kissed her fondly, merely said, "I know all, my love—I am sorry, but it is only what I expected," and offering his arm, led her on towards the house.



## CHAPTER II.

THE few days that elapsed between the scene mentioned in the last chapter, and Louisa's departure for London, seemed to her to pass with unusual rapidity. There was much to be done and to be thought of ; and as the time approached for leaving her father, her heart became more and more saddened at the prospect. He, however, with his usual self-command, would not allow her to perceive how much he himself suffered ; and his cheerfulness and the thought of meeting Lennox, which would intrude itself, though she accused herself of selfishness for permitting it to do so, enabled her to keep up her spirits, though she was far from regarding the expedition in the same light as when it was first proposed ; and it was with far different feelings from those which would be felt by

most girls of her age under similar circumstances, that she stepped into the phaeton by her father's side on her way to the railway by which they were to be conveyed to London. As she traversed the road, too, and passed the turn which led to the scene of her father's accident, her thoughts reverted to Wentworth, to whom under God he owed his safety, and she sighed deeply as she bitterly regretted her inability to requite him for his generous conduct.

It had never even occurred to her that she might reward him by giving him her hand, and striving afterwards to let her heart follow it. Such an offering, even if she could have resigned herself to the sacrifice, she would have considered unworthy of him. Her father guessed her thoughts, and by engaging her in conversation on different subjects, endeavoured to divert them, an attempt in which he partially succeeded. A few hours' whirl and bustle of the railway brought them to town, where Lady Barbara's carriage was in waiting to take them to her house, where Ferdinand was to stay for the night, and, where, indeed, he was pressed to remain

for a longer period ; but he refused, thinking that his daughter would accommodate herself to her new habits better in his absence, and would feel his loss less, if he quitted her while everything was new and strange, than if he remained long enough to permit his absence to cause a void in her daily habits and associations.

Louisa was charmed, not only with the beauty and elegance of her new abode, but with the kind and attentive thoughtfulness and affection which had suggested all the arrangements. She felt deeply grateful to her aunt ; and when they all four sat down to dinner, she was gayer and happier than she had been for many days.

The following morning, however, was a great trial for both father and daughter. After an early breakfast, Ferdinand took a hasty farewell of his tenderly-loved child, and, hardly trusting himself to speak, quitted the house, and in a few minutes more was being borne along on the wings of steam by the mail train to W——. He felt the parting deeply, for he felt that it was not only an interval of

time that was to separate him from his daughter but that, during that time, she would be introduced to a life of trials and temptations, as well as pleasures and enjoyments far different from those to which she had been accustomed. To these peculiar sources of uneasiness was added the natural pain of a father at missing the society of his darling child from whom he had lately been separated. He felt this the more after he arrived at W——, when he was driving himself home in his phaeton. On the preceding day she had been sitting by his side and he had scarcely known how precious her society was to him, until now that he found himself deprived of it. He reflected moreover, that when she did return to him, it might only be in a short time to be followed by a yet more complete and lasting separation. What then the happy days of old never again to return? He sighed, and thought of his lost wife and that, had she been spared, no earthly power would have separated them. And then he accused himself of a reigning temper, and breathed a fervent prayer that the Almighty would order

all for the happiness of his darling child, and give him strength to submit with cheerfulness to whatever might be in store for him.

To Louisa, of course, the trial was far less severe. The parting undoubtedly caused her great pain ; but she had so many novelties to attract and engage her attention, that she was, necessarily, soon diverted from her first regrets. And, moreover, with her there were none of those old associations which were crowding around her father, and which render a parting so immeasurably more painful to those that are left behind than to those that go. Children, when they go to school, always fancy that they are so much more to be pitied than their parents, or than those more fortunate brothers and sisters who remain at home. They think that, while they have all the annoyances and inconveniences of school to submit to, besides the pain of parting, those left behind feel only the latter pain, and are comparatively happy, because they are still enjoying the luxuries of home. But it may be doubted, whether, in spite of

such considerations as these, the parents and relations who are left, and who are constantly feeling the gap made in the once complete family circle, are not more to be commiserated than the weeping boy who in a few hours has dried his tears, and in the bustle of his school-life ceased to give more than a passing sigh to the home he had so lately quitted. It was on this principle that Ferdinand had firmly refused to make a longer stay in town. If he once permitted himself to be mixed up in the daily round of Louisa's occupations, he knew that the parting from him would be much more bitter, and that she would then be placed in the category of those that are left. And with his usual self-denial, he determined that this should not be the case. His fatherly forethought was rewarded, for Louisa certainly did feel the parting much less than she had expected.

She was very busy during the morning in unpacking her things, and arranging them in her own apartments; and, immediately after luncheon, Lady Barbara carried her off in the carriage to purchase her

court dress, as the first drawing-room was to be held in the next week, when the awful ceremony of presentation was to take place.

That important operation achieved, Lady Barbara suggested that they should go into the park, if Louisa did not feel tired ; and, as this latter was far too much amused and excited to be conscious of any fatigue, the suggestion was carried into effect. As they entered the drive, and fell into the line which, going at a foot's pace, met another line going equally slow, her wonder at the number and variety of the equipages was unbounded. Here, however, a new excitement occurred still further to occupy her bewildered mind.

Many gay horsemen walked or cantered past, some of whom, being known to Lady Barbara, took off their hats with profound politeness, generally bestowing on Louisa a look which partook more or less of the nature of a stare, in proportion to the good breeding of the respective gazers. Suddenly, the thought occurred to her, might not Lennox be among these ? And, as far as her natural diffidence and modesty per-

looking out from each corner with the anxious hope that she might behold the man whoseiments were so deeply engrained upon her memory. In this search, however, she was doomed to be disappointed. Many a horseman passed and drove, and many a handsome face was presented to her scrutiny, but the one she sought, the one she cared to see, was not among them. And this disappointment cast a slight gloom over the enjoyment of her otherwise highly amusing afternoon.

When she came home she confessed to having a little fret. But Lady Barbara told her that it did not much signify, as she was not going out in the evening; and that, in fact, as the drawing-room was so close at hand, she did not mean that she should go out until after she had been presented. Lennox very willingly acquiesced in this decision, though she feared it would put off her meeting with Lennox, as until she went out she was not likely to see him, unless, indeed, he should chance to encounter her driving with Lady Barbara, and thereby be induced to call.



It was only for a week, however, and she really was not sorry to have some little time to make herself at home in her new abode, before she was formally introduced into society.

## CHAPTER III.

A WEEK passed away, and the day of the drawing-room arrived, without anything being seen or heard of Mr. Lennox. It was so extremely probable that he had not yet heard that Louisa was in town, that she would have thought nothing of his non-appearance, had it not been for his having neglected to make an effort to see her when he was staying at Moor Park; for this, although Louisa had tried to satisfy herself with Susan Vernon's explanations, had more or less rankled in her mind, and made her nervously anxious lest, when she came to town, she should find herself no longer the object of his attention. She had eagerly looked out for him in the course of her drives with Lady Barbara—but in vain. She began to wonder whether he was in town. She

did not like to ask Lady Barbara, and her aunt did not mention the subject, being in truth a little anxious about the matter herself, and wishing Louisa to attribute any apparent neglect to any cause but indifference to herself.

The day of the drawing-room, however, arrived without his making his appearance, and Louisa anxiously wondered whether she should be likely to meet him there or not, and if she did, what would be his manner towards her. She trembled as she thought of the numerous rivals she must have—so many girls richer, lovelier, and of higher rank than herself—and thought that she must indeed appear almost beneath his notice. But then the recollection of some of his words, and still more of his looks, would occur to her, and she would feel a secret confidence that, if he saw her, he would not entirely neglect her.

And indeed it would have been difficult for any one to have treated Louisa Castleton with neglect, beautiful as she appeared when the important business of the toilette was at last completed. Lady Barbara

gazed at her with surprise and pleasure, saying, as she kissed her forehead,—

“ Really, my dear little niece, I had no idea how very pretty you were. I shall have a responsible office as *chaperone*, I can see.”

Louisa blushed, and hoped inwardly that the one whom only she wished to please would be of the same mind with her aunt. Oh! if he were not there, after all, how disappointed she would be.

The time occupied in proceeding to the palace appeared endless to Louisa, who was anxious to arrive, and was almost afraid of looking out of the carriage window, lest she should be stared at by the crowds who stood gazing at the long line of handsome carriages, which were slowly wending their way towards St. James's.

Suddenly her eye was caught by what struck her as a well-known face. She looked again—she could not be mistaken—there, leaning out of an upper window of one of the houses, was Mary Brown, whose disappearance had been so nearly fatal to her poor old grandmother at Shelbridge. As the carriage moved on, Louisa

lost sight of her almost immediately, but not before she had caught sight of a red-coated arm, which seemed very much as if it encircled the girl's waist. The owner of the arm seemed evidently to shun observation, as his face was entirely concealed by the draperies of the curtains, but the sight of it confirmed the story that the girl herself had told ; and Louisa sighed to think that she was probably still persevering unrepentant in her course of sin. This incident cast a slight gloom over her spirits, and she did not again speak, until the final stoppage of the carriage warned them that they were actually arrived.

In a few minutes more they had traversed the long corridor, ascended the staircase, delivered their tickets, and found themselves in the midst of a gorgeously dressed throng, all awaiting with more or less impatience the opening of the doors which were to admit them to the presence of Her Majesty. Amidst the waving of plumes and feathers, the jingling of swords and spurs, and the universal buzz of voices, Louisa felt quite bewildered, and clung closely to her aunt's

and, a proceeding by no means unnecessary, as the press was so great that it was not without difficulty she preserved herself from being separated from her. Lady Barbara, of course, found numerous acquaintances, and amongst others, our old friend, Mrs. Macdonald.

"What a crowded square, is it not?" said Lady Barbara.

"Oh, crowded! but I have a capital plan to save myself from being crushed. I always take a large pin with me, and if my gentleman comes unpleasantly near, I just pin it into him once or twice, and he soon gives me room enough; see here—" and as she spoke she displayed a common pin of the largest size, with which she declared her intention of defending herself against all comers.

"Well, pray let me follow in your wake then," said Lady Barbara, laughing, "for you will clear the way famously for us, and when the doors are opened, I expect the crush will be tremendous. But where's Captain Macdonald?"

"Oh, he's on guard. It is such a bore. I certainly should not have come,

if I had known it ; but he fully intended coming with me, when just at the last moment Captain Blueskin chose to fall ill, and so poor dear George was obliged to take his place ; and then, as I had got my train and all that, why of course I was obliged to come."

This suggested a new doubt to Louisa's mind. If Captain Macdonald was on guard, Lennox might be also ; that would be too provoking ;—but her reflections were cut short by the opening of the doors, and the consequent rush towards the "pen," when, as her aunt had foretold, the crush was tremendous.

Louisa escaped with a slight rent in her dress, caused by the spur of one gentleman, and a scratch on the shoulder from the epaulette of another ; and after a momentary thought that Her Majesty's court was more like a bear-garden than anything she had ever seen before, became entirely absorbed with the contemplation of the awful ceremony, now momentarily approaching. It seemed to be coming upon her so rapidly. They had passed into the *entrée* room ; they were close to the

doors of the throne room, and she was hardly conscious of what happened, till she found herself through the doors on the opposite side, the alarming ceremony having been safely got over, almost without her knowing it. She felt an indescribable sensation of relief, and was raising her eyes to her aunt, who having just preceded her was now turning to congratulate her on its being "all over now," when she heard her name pronounced by a well-known voice, and the next instant her hand was clasped in that of Lennox, who, his face flushed with excitement, and looking handsomer than ever in his Guards uniform, stood before her, so evidently and unfeignedly delighted at seeing her, that all her doubts and suspicions vanished like a dream—she saw at once that he was entirely taken by surprise, and that the surprise was of a particularly joyful nature. Her heart bounded with delight, and she felt that now she was indeed happy.

Lennox's enquiries were rapid and earnest. "How long had she been in town? how long was she likely to stay? was she



really going to pass the whole season there?" all so evidently prompted by a real and sincere interest, that every word carried further conviction and additional happiness to Louisa's heart. She now no longer doubted his eloquent and fervent protestations of grief at not having been able to see her when he was at Moor Park, and blamed herself for having ever, even to herself, accused him of neglect. In the midst of one of his speeches, however, he was cut somewhat short by their suddenly stumbling upon Mrs. Vernon and Isabella—to whom they could not avoid speaking, and who might not perhaps have been flattered had they heard the vehemence with which Lennox was deploring his having been unable to desert them, in order to go and see Louisa.

Isabella, for her part, was by no means pleased at the aspect of affairs. She had known that Louisa was in town, and that, as a matter of course, she must some day meet with Lennox, but she had hoped that time had ere this cooled his passion for her, and was not prepared for the evident joy at the meeting, which was

now so visibly depicted on his countenance. She felt vexed, gave a snappish answer to a question he put to her respecting some ball at which she had been present a night or two before, and turned abruptly away to speak to a young man in the Foreign Office, whom she had been unmercifully snubbing a few minutes before, but who was now charmed by the sudden change in her manner, being in happy ignorance that the cause was simply a desire to vex and, if possible, to pique Lennox.

In this amiable wish, however, she was this time doomed to be disappointed. Lennox saw through the manoeuvre, smiled almost imperceptibly, and turned again to talk to Louisa, only too glad that they were thus both of them relieved from the necessity of being civil to the peevish Isabella, whose temper was not improved by Mrs. Macdonald's coming up a few minutes afterwards and saying—

“ Well, my dear Miss Vernon, I've just seen your sister's friend, Miss Castleton, and Charles Lennox, just as thick as they were at Stapleford—I suppose it will be a match this time, won't it ? ”

“I suppose so,” said Isabella, “shortly ;” adding to herself, “not if I can help it, though.”

“Shall we give you a lift home, Mr. Lennox?” said Lady Barbara, “we have plenty of room, for we have a coach, and Sir William is not here—and it could set you down in Wilton Crescent, if you liked.”

Lennox hesitated, and Louisa looked up in surprise—she thought he would have at once jumped at the offer, but he replied—

“Thank you very much, Lady Barbara, but my cab is here, and I have promised to set down a friend, who lives in another part of the town.”

It did just occur to Louisa that he might have allowed his friend to drive himself home, and his “tiger” to bring back the cab, but she supposed that very likely he did not choose to entrust his horse to any other hands than his own ; and besides she was so happy, that she could not allow anything to throw a shade at that time over her enjoyment.

Lennox was as attentive as possible during the remainder of the drawing-room, looked for their carriage, stayed

with them till it was ready, and finally handed them in it—taking little or no notice of the other four ladies with whom he was acquainted. When they had driven off, however, he went in search of his own cab, and having found it, seemed to forget to wait for the friend he had mentioned, but drove off at once, and drew up at the door of the house in ——— Street, at the window of which Louisa had fancied she had seen the face of Mary Brown.

He did not stay there long, however, having apparently gone rather in fulfilment of some promise than from any very earnest wish on his own part; and when he came out he jumped into his cab, drove rapidly to Winton Crescent, and, having hastily changed his dress, proceeded immediately to call on Lady Barbara.

A visit so soon after their long interview at the Palace appeared to the latter so very marked an attention, that she almost expected him to propose then and there. Louisa, however, though pleased and gratified, did not think so much of what it portended—she was wholly engrossed with the pleasure of seeing him.

and with comparing his appearance now with that which he had just presented when in uniform—she thought that he looked very handsome in uniform certainly, but still she liked him better now. He was more like what he had been at Stapleford.

Time flew rapidly by, as he sat in the drawing-room with them, chatting pleasantly on a variety of topics, and recalling many circumstances of bygone days, and Louisa was delighted to find by his conversation that he frequented much the same set that she was about to live in, and that at nearly all of the balls and parties for which she and her aunt had received invitations Lennox would also be present. When at last the sound of the dressing-bell informed them that it was indeed seven o'clock, and that Lennox had actually stayed for upwards of an hour, it was hardly possible that they could believe that he had been there so long, and it is almost doubtful which of the two had derived most enjoyment from the visit.

## CHAPTER IV.

As LEITCHER hurried home to dress for dinner, he felt almost wild with the intoxication of the pleasure in which he had been indulging. Louisa's fascinations exercised a power over his heart greater even than they had done formerly. He had remembered that she was lovely, charming; and if he had known of her intended appearance in town, he would have looked forward to it with eagerness and anxiety; but still he would not have expected to have been half so much delighted—he did not remember that she was half so lovely, so charming, as he found was actually the case. He had no idea how great her power really was over him. But now that he had found out how much he cared for her, he was overtaken by a new fear. When she made her appear-

e in society, her acquaintance wou'd  
redly be sought by most of the  
, rich, and fashionable young men  
ut town, and he might find him-  
discarded in favour of some new ad-  
er. He flattered himself, however,  
t at present no one disputed with  
the possession of her heart ; and he  
ught that it would be a fine stroke of  
cy to strike while the iron was hot,  
bind her to him at once and for ever.  
h this end he determined that that  
y evening, as he was going to dine at  
e with the family party, he would  
ak to his father on the subject, and en-  
vour to obtain his sanction to his at-  
e making a formal proposal for the  
d of Miss Castleton.

t was now nine months since he had  
broached the topic, and every month  
, of course, increased the chance that  
isa had of being ultimately the great  
ess that he knew his father would de-  
to find in a daughter-in-law.

Accordingly, after dinner, as soon as his  
her and sisters had retired, and Lord  
nox and his son were left *tête-à-tête*,

the latter commenced the conversation by saying—

“ You remember, sir, that last year, when I was on the point of leaving town for Stapleford Castle, we had some conversation respecting Miss Castleton, the daughter of Lord Stapleford’s son, the clergyman.”

“ Yes,” replied Lord Lennox, settling himself in his chair, and apparently preparing himself for a discussion, if not an argument, on some important point; “ I remember perfectly. I told you that she might very possibly become an immense heiress, and that it might be very well worth your while to keep an eye upon her—but nothing more, Charles—nothing more !”

“ Well, sir, I so far obeyed your directions as to keep an eye upon her; for in truth I found her so exceedingly lovely that it was difficult for me to take my eyes off her. But, in short, I may as well tell you at once. We became very intimate at Stapleford—I conceived an attachment for her, which I hope was returned



“And so, sir,” said the General, getting very red in the face—“so you chose to fall in love, and, I suppose, engage yourself to marry a girl who may not have a penny, without doing me the honour of consulting me on the subject at all; and now, nearly a twelvemonth afterwards, you are graciously condescending to inform me of it. Sir, I am extremely obliged to you.”

“Nay, my dear father,” replied Lennox, smiling; “do not think so badly of me. I assure you I acted in a manner the very opposite to that which you are imagining. It is true, as you say, that I conceived an attachment for Miss Castleton; but it is equally true that I have restrained my inclinations, and most carefully avoided committing myself. And the reason of my speaking to you now on the subject is, that Miss Castleton is come to town. I feel that my passion for her is more ardent than ever, and I fear lest, if I delay much longer in making my declaration, some other suitor may step in and snatch the prize out of my grasp. We are not the only people who are aware that Miss

Castleton may probably become a very great heiress. I therefore entreat you now to give your sanction to my making a regular and formal proposal."

"Well, Charles, well!" replied the old peer, now quite mollified, and feeling considerably ashamed of himself for having given way to such an uncalled-for outbreak of temper. "I must say that if that is the case, you have behaved very well, and I should like to do everything in my power to further your wishes; but I don't know what to say, really, about this proposal. You know it is a very serious thing to commit yourself in that way. It is certainly very true that the young lady may be very well off some day, but there are a great many chances against her. At this very moment Lady—what's her name?—her aunt, out there in Germany, may be likely to give an heir to the family, and these people here may say nothing about it, in hopes of getting the girl married first. We must be very cautious—very cautious. I don't know what to say about it—I don't know what to say about it!"

It was the habit of Lord Lennox to repeat the last words of his sentence when he became excited. He brought them out so rapidly, however, that there was no time lost in the operation.

“But even if she does not become the heiress to her grandfather, she is, at any rate, the only daughter of her father.”

“Only fiddlestick !” replied Lord Lennox ; “ I know pretty well what Ferdinand Castleton’s fortune was, and I am sure he has not saved much ; and it would be nothing but a drop in the ocean in comparison with your necessities. I tell you you must have £30,000 at the very least with your wife ; and, with my consent, you shall never marry a woman with less. And I tell you what, Master Charles—if you ever presume to marry or engage yourself without my consent, not one shilling of my money shall you ever see—not one shilling ; and you know it is all in my own power—all in my own power !”

“ I promise you that, sir,” said his son ; “ but, putting my love for Miss Castleton out of the question, don’t you think that so large a stake as the Stapleford estates would be, is worth a little risk ?”

“I hate risk!” replied the General;  
“I hate risk! There are lots of girls  
with thirty or forty thousand pounds, who  
would be happy to have you, I have no  
doubt—only for your title, let alone your  
handsome face. There’s that Miss Ver-  
non—even my old eyes could see that she  
was looking very sweet upon you, and  
she’s got at least forty thousand pounds.  
Much better have her, Charles—much  
better have her, and then there’s no risk;  
and I hate risk—I hate risk!”

It did not seem to occur to the old gen-  
tleman that the putting in peril the do-  
mestic happiness of the whole of one’s  
future life, was as great a risk as marrying  
a girl with an uncertain fortune; and Len-  
nox either did not see it himself, or did  
not think it worth while to argue the point  
with his father, for he made no answer;  
and Lord Lennox, after a minute’s silence,  
resumed—

“I’ll tell you what it must be, Charles.  
I can’t hear of your proposing at once;  
but you must watch your game. If nothing  
happens to alter Miss Castleton’s position,  
you can leave her alone for the present,

and if you see any one else making up to her with any appearance of success, then come and let me know, and we will talk the matter over again : but if she loses her chance of being Lord Stapleford's heiress, you must give her up at once—give her up at once—and then I am sure I don't know why you should not take up with Miss Vernon. She has plenty of money, and seems a very nice girl—a very nice girl—and now shall we go to the drawing-room ?”

The *séance* was thus broken up, and, in reflecting on what had passed, the father took great credit to himself for the forethought with which he watched over his son's welfare ; while the son, in resolving to comply with his father's directions, was no less satisfied that he was performing a most exemplary part in being thus obedient to the wishes of his parent. Thus each considered themselves patterns of propriety, and neither seemed to think of the anguish they might be storing up for the innocent girl, whose fate was thus made to depend upon an event over which she could have no control, and to the issue of which, under other circumstances, she would have been

almost indifferent. Little did she dream, poor girl ! as she sat over the fire in her aunt's drawing-room, with her head and her heart full of nought but Lennox, that at that very moment her fate was being decided on, or rather was left to turn on the balance of a hair.

Her dreams that night were all of Lennox, and she was grieved, at waking, to find that they were but dreams. Alas ! how strong a likeness do the dreams of the night bear to the dreams of the day, and if we are sorry to awake from the former, oh ! how bitter shall we find it when we are forced to awake from the latter ; when we find that our most cherished hopes—our most treasured fancies—are dreams ; that the very idol of our heart has been adorned only with the unreal beauty of a vision !

But Louisa thought not of this, and her spirits were high at breakfast ; after which her joy was completed by a visit from her dear friend Susan, who explained that the reason that she had not before seen her was that Mrs. Vernon had left town for Easter, and had only returned just in time for the

drawing-room. She added, that she had wished very much to have come on the previous day, and seen her beloved Louisa dressed for court ; but that as the carriage and both the footmen were wanted for her mother and sister, she had no means of coming, except on foot by herself, which her mother had positively forbidden.

“ But, my dear,” she went on to say, “ I understand that you encountered somebody at the drawing-room far more worth seeing than me.”

“ If you mean Mr. Lennox,” replied Louisa blushing, “ I certainly met him, and I will not deny that I was very glad to see him ; for though you made his excuses so prettily, I was not quite satisfied at his not having been to see me when he was at Moor Park ; but now I am *quite* convinced that it was impossible, and that you gave a true account of the matter.”

Susan smiled, and thought how easy it was to believe what fell from the lips of the beloved one ; and then, by a natural transition, her thoughts reverted to Wentworth, and she expressed a hope that Louisa had left all well at Shelbridge.

"Quite well, thank you," replied Louisa. "Papa, you know, came up with me, and, of course, was very sorry to part with me; but he writes me word that he is quite well and comfortable now."

No mention of Wentworth. Susan did not like to utter his name; but still she longed to hear of him, so as Louisa did not seem inclined to volunteer any information, she ventured to suggest—

"I suppose Mr. Wentworth is there to keep him company."

"Yes," replied Louisa, with a slight embarrassment perceptible in the tone of her voice, and the casting down of her eyes; "but I suppose you know that he is going to leave us—he has got a living."

This was, indeed, a startling announcement to Susan. Wentworth had got a living—could therefore marry whenever he pleased. She had been so in the habit of considering his marriage as a distant prospect, that the idea of its possibly taking place at any time was an astounding one to her. He might marry Louisa—or, if he were refused by her, might resign himself to some one else, and—she could not



finish the picture she was mentally drawing; but, as she did not wish Louisa to divine her secret, she made a violent effort over herself, and said, as calmly as she could—

“ I wonder you did not tell me in any of your letters.”

“ I wonder I did not,” replied Louisa. “ In fact, I can only account for it by supposing that a press of matter prevented my doing so in the first letter I wrote to you after we knew of it, and that afterwards I imagined that I had already mentioned it. These things do happen sometimes, when we write very often.”

It was very true that they did; but somehow Susan thought there was something peculiar in Louisa's manner, and that something had passed between her and Wentworth that she did not choose to tell. Perhaps he had proposed; and, if he had, he had certainly been rejected, and what would be the consequence? Would he in a fit of pique marry some one else? She could not, however, press Louisa more closely; so she merely asked,

“ But where is his living? and when does he go to take possession of it?”

“ The living is in Yorkshire, but he will not go to it for some time yet ; he remains at Shelbridge to keep papa company until I return, or am on the point of returning, for, I fear,” she added, hesitating, “ that he will not be able to stay for all the time I am in London.”

Here was another blow to poor Susan. Yorkshire was more than a hundred miles from Shelbridge or Moor Park, and he would be gone before they returned to the country. Oh, when should she see him again ? Perhaps never—never more—for she could not hope that she was *now* of sufficient importance to induce him to come any distance to see *her*, and all her little hopes seemed to wither in the bud ; and she could not help so far giving utterance to her thoughts as to say—

“ Then you will not, perhaps, see him again ?”

“ Perhaps not,” replied Louisa ; and her manner was now so evidently embarrassed, that Susan was more than ever convinced that something unpleasant had passed between them. If not, Louisa would certainly have expressed herself

openly sorry at parting from one whom Susan knew she liked and valued so much. And this put the last touch to her discomfiture. If things had remained as they were, Wentworth would probably have been a frequent visitor at Shelbridge, and Susan might have met him there ; but now this, her last chance, seemed taken from her, and in all the horizon of the future she could not discern one single glimmer of hope. All was dark and dismal. There seemed to be nothing for her now to look forward to in this world ; and her dismay and disappointment were almost as great as on the memorable occasion when she first learnt from Wentworth's own lips that he had conceived an attachment for another.

She became so pale, and looked so ill, that Louisa became seriously alarmed, and begged her aunt would send her home in the carriage—a request with which Lady Barbara most willingly complied, and to which Susan was fain to accede, as she felt that she could hardly have reached home on foot. She blamed herself for being so foolish, and assured herself again

and again that it could make no difference to her, as he could never have cared for her! But it was all in vain; she had hoped against hope, and was now bitterly disappointed at the last vestige of hope being taken from her.

## CHAPTER V.

same evening Louisa was to make her first appearance at a London ball. She had heard that it was Lady Pampisford who was to be at the ball, as though she had not seen her at Stapleford, she was better than an entire stranger, and it would be almost impossible to have the face even of a mere acquaintance to give a welcome at the top of the stairs. Her ladyship lived in Grosvenor Square, and thither accordingly did Barbara and her niece repair shortly after eleven o'clock ; the heart of the latter was beating high with suspense and curiosity, all as with the expectation of seeing her well-loved idol. As they entered the house and ascended the stairs, she felt dizzy with excitement ; and she could hardly help smiling when the thought suddenly occurred to her, how very different

at home were from those which might not be expected from the quiet daughter of a country squire. Lady Penelope's former reputation, and Lady Berners' present popularity, however, did not restore her self-possession than any one might expect. But her eyes opened with pleasure when, on entering the hall, the first person they encountered was Charles Lennox himself, who, considering that in father's advice to watch over Miss Castleton would be best complied with by using every means to retain the man already held in her favour, will, I presume, keep off every competitor, and make the exertion of arriving early that in due time he might be in the van of the first dance.

"How in you do, Mr. Lennox?" said Lady Berners. "You are quite early to-night; you are not usually so active."

"I never before had such an inducement to be so," replied he, bowing to Emma, who blushed at the compliment. "And besides," he continued, "I was fearful of being anticipated in the humble request I am about to prefer to Miss Cas-

tleton, that she will allow me the pleasure of dancing the first quadrille with her."

"I shall be very happy," replied Louisa, the phrase for once being used in genuine sincerity.

"I see they are just forming the first set," resumed he; "so perhaps we had better take our places. Fitzosborne, will you be our *vis-à-vis*?"

"I shall be delighted," replied Lord Augustus. "How de do, Miss Castleton? I am so glad you are come to town. I heard of your being at the drawing-room, though I was not there myself. But if I am to have the honour of being your *vis-à-vis*, I must go and look for a partner, and then I hope I may have the pleasure of waltzing with you?"

Receiving a gracious assent, the young man hurried off to look for a partner, and speedily returned with one, who probably little thought that she was indebted for the honour of dancing with the Lord Augustus Fitzosborne, to the simple fact that he wanted to be *vis-à-vis* to the pretty Miss Castleton, and she was the first disengaged young lady on whom he happened to stumble in his hurry.

"Though Fitzosborne has obtained the answer of the next waltz," said Lennox, as they were taking their places, "I hope I may not be entirely excluded, and am not to try to content myself with only the first quadrille—that would, indeed, make the evening a blank. Say that I may have the waltz after the next!"

Louisa had an indistinct idea that dancing again with the same gentleman so soon might appear particular; but she was not sure, and did not know how to refuse, even had her inclination urged her to do so, which it assuredly did not. She therefore made no objection to the proposed arrangement, and then gave herself up to the enjoyment of her partner's conversation, which she found to the full as agreeable as heretofore.

It seemed quite incredible that the quadrille could really be over, and Louisa felt quite certain that they had left out half the figure, when the music stopped; and as a means of prolonging their pleasure a little longer, they went in search of some one. On their return from the tea-room they encountered Mrs. and Miss Vernon,



and Lennox, as he passed, engaged the latter in a low voice to dance the then impending waltz with him. It was no part of his plan to break with Isabella, partly because she was a great fortune and might do for him some of these days, in case circumstances should prevent his marrying Miss Castleton, but, principally, because she was a clever, amusing girl, who thought it worth her while to make herself agreeable to him, and who had the power as well as the will to do so.

Having, therefore, re-conducted Louisa to her aunt, who was speedily relieved of her charge by Lord Augustus, Lennox made his way back to Mrs. Vernon and Isabella, claimed the latter as his partner, and, the music having already begun, he passed his arm round her waist and waltzed till they were both out of breath, almost before he had exchanged a word with her.

“Well, Mr. Lennox,” said the young lady, as soon as she had recovered her breath; “I hope you are quite happy now—there are no longer any snowy roads or icy paths to separate you from a certain young lady, who I am glad to see, for your sake, is come to town.”

“ You are very welcome to insinuate as much as you please, Miss Vernon,” replied Lennox, smiling; “ but remember you have no proof against me—I did *not* take any steps to see the young lady on the occasion you speak of, and surely my dancing the first quadrille with her does not prove much—I must have danced it with somebody, and *you* were not in the room.”

“ And much difference it would have made if I had been !” said she laughing; “ come, Mr. Lennox, don’t be a hypocrite ! There’s no harm in admiring a pretty girl, and we know you were very much smitten at Stapleford ; indeed, if she did not think so, do you think she would have thought it worth her while to come all the way up to town to look after you ?”

“ Look after *me* ! what nonsense ! as if *that* had anything to do with her coming to town,” replied Lennox, a little flattered, nevertheless, by the supposition.

“ People might think so, at any rate,” said Isabella ; “ and they might think that you had something to do with that poor wretch in the country whom she jilted so

f I was not speaking to you, I should  
'shamefully'—the other day."

'What was that?' said Lennox; "I  
sure you, I never heard anything about  
till now."

"No? oh, come, now, that's too good!  
you mean to pretend that you never  
ard of a certain young clergyman down  
the country, who had been paying his  
dresses to Miss Castleton ever since she  
t on long frocks, I believe, and to  
om she gave every encouragement till  
e found somebody better, when she un-  
emoniously cast off the old love, and—  
ople *will* say it, you know—came to  
wn to look after the new? But now shall  
take another turn?"

They whirled away till the music ceased,  
d Isabella returned to her mother with  
e pleasing conviction that she had in-  
lled into Lennox's mind the idea, at  
y rate, that Louisa was a coquette, a  
rt, and a jilt, that as she had thrown  
er one admirer for him, so she might  
ry possibly throw him over in favour of  
me one else. She knew that an idea of  
at kind once sown will often, though

apparently neglected at the time, take root and flourish, and bear fruit many-fold—and she flattered herself, therefore, that she had thus early in the day adopted a master-stroke of policy in the contest which she found was to take place between herself and her rival, for the possession of Charles Lennox's hand and heart.

An ill-disposed young man might have done as much for Lennox during the same waltz ; for the long conversation in which both he and his partner were apparently so interested, looked sufficiently suspicious ; but Lord Augustus was far too good-humoured, and too happy at having got the pretty Miss Castleton to himself for a quarter of an hour, and she consequently enjoyed a very pleasant waltz, looking forward, however, to the next one, as likely to be still more delightful.

But some time was destined to elapse ere the wished-for waltz could arrive ; the time, however, passing tolerably quickly considering, for Louisa's hand was eagerly sought, and she was not once left for more than five minutes at a time under her

*perone's* wing. Lennox, however, did not dance, but stood in a corner, anxiously watching Louisa's different partners, and observing their behaviour towards them. At length, however, the time arrived, the last bars of the quadrille had been played, Louisa had declined to go down to supper, though the supper-rooms were now opened, having made a previous promise to Lennox that she would wait to go down with him ; and almost before her partner had conducted her to her aunt, she found herself claimed by Lennox, and, nothing loth, led off to take their places in the circle.

"You have not been dancing much, Mr. Lennox," said Louisa, who had been rather wondering at his indolence, as she fancied it to be.

"Oh, Miss Castleton ! how could I dance with any one else, when I was looking forward to this waltz with you ? Instead of talking to my partners, I should have been only thinking how soon the dance would be over, that this one might be brought nearer ; and besides, I have been watching you, a far more interesting occupation than dancing with any one else."

Louisa blushed and felt embarrassed—she did not much like these very direct compliments, even from Lennox. She thought, however, that it was better not to appear to take notice, and so replied, with an air of gaiety—

“But do you not mean to dance any more all the season, Mr. Lennox? or do you expect that the effect of my appearance will be only temporary, and will wear off by degrees?”

“I fear its effect on me will be but too permanent,” he replied. “However,” he added, thinking that perhaps he was going a little too far, “I will not say that I shall not dance at all during the rest of the season—though, compared with my dances with you, all the others will seem dull indeed. But now let us go on—for the music has begun some time, and, however delightful your conversation is, there is a pleasure in the actual waltzing with you, that can, alas! only be enjoyed for a few minutes, and the opportunity for which must therefore not be neglected.”

In the mean time, Lennox’s evident admiration and attention had not escaped

the notice of his friends and acquaintance, some of whom, lounging about the door, were looking on with evident interest.

“Who is that devilish pretty girl that Lennox is coming it so strong with?” asked Captain Baldwin of the Life Guards, of the knot of young men above alluded to.

“I really don’t know,” replied one of them; “she is quite new—come out this year—and seems to belong to Lady Bab Pleydell. But here comes Pleydell—he’s a cousin of Lady Barbara’s husband, and besides, I think he has been dancing with her, so he is sure to know. Pleydell, we want you to tell us who that pretty girl is you danced the last polka with, and whom Lennox is waltzing with now? By Jove! look at him, is not he just coming it strong!”

“Oh! that is Miss Castleton. She is a niece of my cousin, Lady Barbara’s. She is grand-daughter of old Lord Stapleford, and I hear she is likely to inherit all his property.”

“No! you don’t say so! what a spec she must be. No wonder Lennox is laying

it on thick. He won't have it all his own way, though, long, I can promise him; a pretty girl with such a prospect as that is too good to be given up without a struggle. But you say she is *likely* to inherit Stapleford—what does it depend upon?"

"Why, you know her father is only the second son, and if Lord Abbotsham has any children, of course it cuts her out. It is true he has been married some years without, but one can never tell; and besides Lady Abbotsham might die, and he might marry again: and, in fact, a thousand things might happen."

"Well, as you say, it is but a chance. However, Lennox seems inclined to run it. I think he's pretty well smitten, independently of the fortune. At any rate, if he does not propose he ought, that's all I can say."

"Come, that's rather good of you, laying down the law as to who ought to propose or not, as if you were not the greatest flirt in the regiment."

"Aye, but nobody minds me; they know that I am a poor devil of a younger son, with only one hundred pounds a year besides



my pay, so that nobody could dream of my proposing. But with Lennox it is different."

"There's some truth in that certainly," replied his friend; "still, I doubt whether Lennox could afford to marry a girl without money much better than you could. The old lord is not rich, and there are lots of sisters."

In the mean time the subjects of all this discussion had finished their waltz, which they had, as may be supposed, enjoyed most thoroughly, and were gone down to supper.

As they went, Lennox said to his fair partner—"I hope you intend to stay for the cotillon, Miss Castleton?"

"Why, really," she replied, smiling, "in my ignorance I do not even know what it is."

"It is always the last dance of the evening, and, under *favourable* circumstances, it is far the pleasantest. It is too complicated to explain by word of mouth; but if you stay, and will do me the honour of dancing it with me, I can make it perfectly simple to you as we go on."

"I do not think my aunt means to stay

late," replied Louisa; "and besides, I do not think she would let me dance with you again."

"But will you, if I remove her objections?" said he, eagerly; "if I persuade her to stay and let you dance the cotillon with me, would you do so? and would it be agreeable to you?"

"Yes, certainly, I should like it," replied Louisa, innocently.

Accordingly, when they returned to Lady Barbara, Lennox commenced the attack.

"Lady Barbara, I have been trying to persuade Miss Castleton to let me dance the cotillon with her, but she says she does not think you mean to stay so late; may I hope that you will so far relax your rules as to stay for this one? Miss Castleton has never seen a cotillon, and I am sure she would be amused and pleased."

Now Lady Barbara, being inclined to do everything in her power to favour the "affair" between her niece and Lennox, had been very well pleased at the evident attentions he was paying her, and was not at all annoyed at his preferring this re-

quest. She thought it politic, however, not to seem too compliant, but make a merit of submission, and therefore said—

“ Really, Mr. Lennox, after Easter the cotillon is always so late ; and besides, Louisa has already danced twice with you, and I think that ought to content you for one night.”

“ Perhaps it ought,” replied Lennox laughing, “ but it does not, and the cotillon does not count as a dance you know. After all, one dances more with other people’s partners than with one’s own ; and, as for its being late, Lady Pampisford’s balls are never *very* late. It is not the way of the house.”

“ But are you sure there is to be a cotillon at all, Mr. Lennox ? I do not think there generally is one here.”

“ Well, then, you will not lose much by complying with my petition, Lady Barbara. Promise to stay and let me dance with Miss Castleton, and I will manage the rest.”

“ Very well,” replied she, “ be it so ; only come back and let me know : for if there is no cotillon, we shall go home earlier.”

Lennox then, delighted with his success, flew off to Lady Fanny Babraham, and, engaging her for the next dance, made himself so agreeable to her, that when he said he hoped there was to be a cotillon, and that he should certainly stay to dance it if there was, she replied that she would see about it, and had no doubt but that they should be able to manage it. And, accordingly, in a few minutes afterwards, it became publicly known throughout the room that the amusements of the evening were to be concluded with a cotillon.

As soon as the well-known notes were struck by the band, who afterwards composed themselves to sleep, being quite accustomed to play that music in their dreams, Lennox rushed to the seat where Lady Barbara, tired of standing, had at last taken refuge, and claiming, for the third time, the hand of her niece, led her up to the further end of the room, where they seated themselves upon a small bench conveniently adapted for holding two.

It is needless, and would be wearisome, to describe all the mazes of the cotillon

in general, and all that was said and done during that cotillon in particular. It is enough to say that Louisa, being just sufficiently known to have plenty of amusement without being so much so as to be worried by being perpetually drawn away from her partner, enjoyed herself beyond everything, and thought it the most delightful dance that had ever been invented; while Lennox, proud of being the partner of one who he already saw was destined to be so much admired, and happy in the enjoyment of her society and conversation, was hardly less pleased than she was. He was glad, too, that the world should see his attentions and the manner in which they were received, as he thought it would be more likely than anything else to keep other admirers at a distance.

Certainly, if this was his object, he was in a great measure successful; for every one began to think that the affair was pretty well arranged, in spite of the asseverations of Miss Isabella Vernon, who assured everybody that there was really nothing in it—that they were both great flirts—that Mr. Lennox was merely amus-

ing himself with a young girl fresh from the country ; while she had already distinguished herself by jilting more than one enamoured swain in the neighbourhood where she had been residing.

As she gave out that this was also her own neighbourhood in the country, her assertions gained a certain degree of credence ; but, nevertheless, public opinion ran high that, in spite of all, it would not be long before Miss Louisa Castleton was transmuted into the Honourable Mrs. Lennox.

## CHAPTER VI.

It would be needless to describe in detail all the occurrences of Louisa Castleton's London season. It is sufficient to say, that the scene described in the last chapter was renewed, with more or less variation, at most of the numerous balls and parties which she attended. Of course the number of her acquaintance rapidly increased, and amongst them were not a few whom her exceeding beauty, her *naïve* manners, or the rumour of her probable expectations, enlisted amongst the ranks of her professed admirers; but the evident attentions of Lennox, and the manner in which they were received, checked the hopes of the boldest; and even the vainest of the butterfly tribe who fluttered around her, and tried to extract some token of preference from the gracious smiles which she

always bestowed on all who addressed her, however frivolous or even tedious she might inwardly deem them, could not be so far blinded by their over-weening self-conceit as to be able to misinterpret the civility, kindness, and courtesy which they invariably met with, into signs that they had aroused any more tender sentiment within her bosom. One or two of another class, who, thinking less of their personal qualifications than of their worldly advantages, deemed that their wealth and rank were sure passports to favour, had laid their coronets and title-deeds at her feet, and were no less mortified than astonished that she would not stoop to pick them up; and Lennox's cheek glowed with satisfaction, as every repulsed admirer gave one proof more of the hold that he possessed over the fair girl's heart. Why, then, did he not at once declare himself? To do him justice, had it depended only on himself, he would have done so—he was most ardently desirous of doing so; and he had extracted a promise from his father that, if no difference took place in Miss Castleton's expectations before the period fixed



for her leaving town, he should have the liberty of speaking out. With this promise he was forced to rest contented; which he did the more readily, as every week that passed furnished additional evidence of the security of his hold of Louisa's heart. He now felt pretty certain that no one could snatch the prize from his grasp; and he knew that he had only to propose, in order that he might be accepted.

But did not Louisa herself feel surprise and vexation at Lennox's continued silence? Many girls in her place would have done so, but she was easy and confiding by nature—she never dreamed of treachery. Lennox had dropped a few hints about his circumstances not permitting him to marry at present—his whole manner showed that his heart was hers—she enjoyed almost daily the pleasure of his society, and she scarcely thought of, or wished for, anything more. She knew that it was not considered right for a gentleman to make a formal proposal, unless he was prepared to go to the altar immediately; and she was quite contented with the belief that there were private

reasons why Lennox could not marry at once, and that therefore his lips were sealed for the present; she did not, however, require that his passion should be expressed in words. The pure and sincere, yet ardent, love that she herself felt towards him enabled her to interpret, with but too much facility, the looks, the tones, in which his love found utterance; and thus week after week glided away, finding and leaving Louisa in a state of the greatest possible enjoyment and happiness. Her naturally gay and lively spirit enjoyed the life of excitement in which she was now indulging, and which the strength of her affection for Lennox, more perhaps than her own good principles, firmly rooted as they were, prevented from being in any degree injurious to her.

When once the heart is firmly fixed upon one object, all the temptations and dissipations of the world fall harmlessly upon it—in one point only is it vulnerable, but in that one point the sensitiveness of the whole seems concentrated; and, if it is wounded there, woe, woe, unutterable woe to it—its fate in this world is sealed.

Lady Barbara, however, who was so much better acquainted with the world and its wickedness, was not quite so easy in her mind at Lennox's protracted courtship. She guessed somewhat nearly at the cause of the delay, without knowing whether it proceeded spontaneously from the caution of the son, or was due to the commands of the father; and, of course, without the satisfaction of knowing the period which the latter had appointed to terminate the present state of suspense. She would have been well pleased had her niece accepted one of the advantageous offers that she had received, or if she would have given encouragement to those who only waited for that to come forward; but Louisa was so evidently devoted to Lennox, that she saw it would be useless to try and persuade her to any such course of conduct, and consequently she did not attempt it.

It would have been more prudent, perhaps, had she cautioned her niece to beware of Lennox, and not surrender her heart till it was formally demanded; but she saw that Louisa was so happy in her

unsuspecting state, that she had not the heart to disturb it ; and besides, she feared that any cautions on that score would be too late. She waited therefore in silence, though with impatience and uneasiness, which were not a little augmented by her suspicions as to the true cause of the delay, as a letter she had received from her sister-in-law, marked "quite private and confidential," had given her reason to believe that if Lennox's proposal depended on the continuance of Louisa's good expectations, it was but too probable that, if it were not made at once, it would not be made at all. The season, however, was now drawing to a close. It was almost impossible that Lennox could hear what she had been made acquainted with, ere they left town ; and, if he was once committed, she felt pretty sure that the old lord's high sense of honour would prevent his forcing, or even permitting his son to retract afterwards. She knew that Lady Abbotsham, who had enjoined her to secrecy, had not confided her secret to any one else, not even to Ferdinand ; and she took very good care not to breathe a

word of it herself even to Louisa. If her conscience whispered to her that the part she was acting in deceiving—or, at least, in concealing the truth—was barely honourable, she consoled herself with the reflection that in this world all went on the maxim of “diamond cut diamond”—that fortune-hunters deserved to be taken in—and that her part was not one whit more dishonourable than that of those who trifled with an innocent young girl’s affections, until they were assured of the amount of her fortune.

But what, in the meanwhile, had been the feelings and conduct of Isabella Vernon? Lennox had for some time attempted to keep on the same footing with her as heretofore; but the more his passion for Louisa increased, the less was he inclined to cultivate an alliance with her rival; and as the time approached when his father’s permission would be given for his formal proposal to Louisa, he considered his union with her so certain, that Isabella and her £40,000 might safely be neglected. Under such circumstances, it might be supposed that Isabella would

have broken with him altogether, and taken up with one of the numerous admirers whom the reputation of her fortune and her many agreeable qualities gathered around her. Such, however, was not the case. By a strange perversity in her character, the more she perceived that any one was devoted to another, the more ardently did she desire to attach him to herself, and consequently the more Lennox neglected her, and devoted himself to Louisa, the more firmly did she resolve that she would yet win him from her, and the more strenuously did she attempt to gain her purpose. And many feelings combined to urge her on to such a course ; she hated Louisa with that intense hatred that only a jealous woman can feel towards her successful rival. She perceived, with feminine quickness of perception, how deeply Louisa's heart was enthralled by Lennox, and she gloated over the prospect of inflicting a cruel wound upon it, while she gratified her own vanity by carrying off an admirer from one of the most distinguished beauties of the season.

But every day seemed to render her task more difficult—her chance of success less possible. Every day Lennox paid less and less attention to her, and became more and more devoted to her rival. The end of the season was now approaching, and she knew as well as Lady Barbara that Louisa's departure into the country would probably bring on a crisis; and she feared that, if Lennox had once committed himself, there could no longer be any room for hope. The necessity for action then was urgent, and she was well nigh at her wits' end; she had tried all the usual arts of dropping insinuations unfavourable to Louisa's character, and suggesting doubts as to the genuineness of her feelings; but Lennox had now become so far entangled by his affection for Louisa, that such devices as these only served yet further to estrange him from the contriver of them; all her great talents for pleasing were exerted, whenever she had an opportunity, but still she had the mortification of seeing, that though a pleased and attentive listener when Louisa was not by, no sooner did her light and

graceful form make its appearance, than, on some pretext or another, he quitted her side, and made his way to his more successful rival.

“I am afraid, my dear,” said her mother, one morning, “that you must give up all hopes of Mr. Lennox. He is evidently beyond the reach of your toils, and has given himself up, body and soul, to that milk-and-water little chit, who is such a friend of Susan’s. I almost wonder he did not fall in love with Susan herself. Ha ! ha !”

And the mother laughed a harsh, dissonant laugh, at the bare idea of any one becoming attached to her own eldest-born.

Isabella, however, did not laugh ; but frowned, and bit her lip. It is unpleasant enough to be conscious of defeat oneself—but it is doubly so to be informed of it by a charitable friend.

“I don’t give him up yet,” said Isabella. “I don’t despair after all of winning him over—not that I care two straws about the man myself—but I should like to see Susan’s face, when she hears that Charles Lennox has proposed for me, and that her



lear friend is broken-hearted. And if I do marry him, won't I make him pay for the trouble he has given me, that's all!"

"That I'll be bound you will," retorted her mother. "The poor man will never know a minute's rest when he has once been safely tied up, and placed his happiness, as they say, in your keeping, I'll warrant; but remember the old proverb about counting your chickens before they are hatched: 'First catch your goose,' as the old Cookery Book has it; and a very appropriate direction it would be in this instance."

"Well, mamma, I am not without hope of catching my goose this time, with your assistance. I have thought of a plan, and with a little ingenuity I think it may be carried out."

"Well, child, what is it? I will do anything I can to help you; for, to tell you the truth, I don't much fancy giving up the game, when once one has taken it in hand:—but what's your plan?"

"Well, you see, I take it that Miss Castleton's fair expectations are just as much an attraction to Charles Lennox as

her fair face ; and that Lord Stapleford's fine property has as much to do with his admiration as his grand-daughter's fine figure ; or, at all events, if he is more disinterested than I give him credit for—or, in other words, a greater fool than I take him for—the old lord, his father, I am sure, has an eye to the main chance, and would never hear of the match, if Miss Castleton had no prospect of anything but her father's fortune.”

“ All that is very possible,” replied her mother ; “ but I do not see how it affects your chances. . Miss Castleton will probably be a great heiress, and I don't see how you can prevent it.”

“ But it is very possible that something may have occurred to interfere with her prospects, which Charles Lennox or his father may not have heard of ; and we may have an intimate friend abroad, who is better informed, and from whom we may have heard all the particulars ; eh, mamma ?”

Mrs. Vernon did not affect to misunderstand her daughter's meaning. She paused for a minute or two before she re-

lied, but it was not that she was shocked at the scheme, or startled at the notion of inventing such a lie, but simply that she did not see how she could give plausibility or currency to the statement, and was meditating as to the practicability of doing so. At last she shook her head—

“I don’t see how it is to be done, my dear; the falsehood would be readily detected. The Castletons are, of course, in constant communication with the Abbot-hams, and would at once discover and expose the untruth ”

“Ay, but then, mamma, they are so much interested, that their denial would not obtain credence so readily as our assertions; and even, if at length it was found that we were ‘mistaken,’ it would take some time; and in that time many things might happen. Lennox might be drawn off; Miss Castleton might suspect that he was looking out for her fortune, and might become irreconcilably offended with him. In fact, it gives us many chances, whereas, if matters remain as they are, I do not see that we have any.”

“There is some truth in that, doubt-

less," replied her mother; "but how are we to set about spreading the story you suggest? If it was known to come from us, it might be viewed with suspicion, as, unfortunately, your attack upon young Lester's hand and heart is pretty well known, and the motive would be too obvious."

"Leave that to me," said Isabella. "Do you only back me up; and, whenever you have an opportunity, assert your implicit belief in the story, and the good reasons you have for placing credence in it."

## CHAPTER VII.

LORD LENNOX was sitting in his arm-chair, with an open letter in his hand. The contents did not appear to be agreeable to him, for as he read he frowned and bit his lip, and the blue veins started out into bold relief upon his forehead. It was evident that vexation, grief, annoyance, and indignation, had combined to place him in no enviable frame of mind. He read the letter through twice, however, without stirring ; and then, stretching out his hand to a bell within reach, he pulled it violently, and resumed his study of the letter. The servant speedily answered to the summons.

“ Is Mr. Lennox in the house ? ”

“ Just come in, my lord. ”

“ Let him know that I wish to speak to him immediately. ”

“ Yes, my lord.”

And the servant withdrew, marvelling much at the unusual circumstance of his young master being summoned to attend upon his old master at that unwonted period of the day.

Charles Lennox himself was little less surprised than his attendant. As far as he knew, everything had been going on smoothly ; he had complied with his father's directions, in deferring his proposal to Miss Castleton until such time as he should receive his permission for making it ; and at the same time he had managed to retain his place in her good graces, so as to leave little or no doubt as to the result of the proposal when made.

Moreover, he had dined at home the day previous, and was about to do so on that day, so that his father might have said anything he pleased to him in their after-dinner *tête-à-tête*. However, there was no use in wondering ; so, prompted as much by curiosity as filial duty, he lost no time in obeying his father's summons. When he entered the room, he saw at a glance that there was something wrong—*very* wrong.

“Sit down, sir,” was Lord Lennox’s only greeting.

Charles Lennox took a chair in silence, wondering what the document could be that had evidently been the cause of so much excitement.

“Pray, sir, do you know one Higgins?”

“Higgins? no, sir,” replied the son.

“Perhaps you are more familiar with the term ‘Higgins, Pilcher and Co.’?”

Lennox started, and changed colour. It was the name of a shop where he had purchased many articles for the use and ornament of the girl Mary Brown; and where he knew that he had a long bill, which had been frequently sent in to him, and as frequently neglected, as he intended either to pay off this and others similar after his marriage, or to make that event an excuse for getting a few hundreds out of “the governor,” to enable him to start fair. However, it was necessary to speak, so he replied—

“Yes, sir, I know the shop kept by the firm of that name, and I am aware that I have a bill there.”

“And you are, doubtless, aware for

whose use and benefit the articles purchased there were intended ? In short, sir, you know the name of Mary Brown ?”

Lennox saw that it was useless to deny this ; at the same time he viewed the coming storm with much alarm. He knew that Lord Lennox had very strict notions about morality, and that he owed the favourable position that he had always maintained in his father’s good opinion very much to the reputation for moral, orderly conduct which he had always enjoyed. and, to say the truth, with this one exception, had deserved. He feared, therefore, that his father’s wrath was very fiercely inflamed against him, and this fear was increased by the cold, calm way in which he spoke—not thickly, rapidly, and constantly repeating his words, as was his custom when excited, but as if he put a strong constraint upon himself, and weighed every word before it was uttered. He saw, however, that the case was clear against him. It was evident that Messrs. Higgins and Co., having become tired of attempting to get their money from him, had sent the bill in to his father ; and, as



the young woman had frequently ordered things there, and had them put down to his account, her name had unfortunately appeared on the bill. He could not think at the moment of any plausible excuse, and so determined to remain passive, and await his father's accusations. He therefore contented himself with replying—

“Yes, sir, I do know that young person.”

“And you do not, of course, attempt to deny the kind of connexion that has existed between you?”

Charles Lennox was silent.

“Now answer me, Charles. Have I not always indulged all your wishes to the full extent of my means, and even beyond my means? Do you not owe me some gratitude for the pains I have taken to render you happy, comfortable, and contented? Ought you not to have endeavoured to please me, or, at any rate, to have avoided anything which you knew would pain me? Do you not know that nothing could possibly give me greater pain than your first entering into a disreputable connexion of this kind, and then

allowing it to lead you to contract debts that you have no means of discharging?"

"I am truly sorry—" began Lennox.

"Repentance, Charles, can only be manifested by deeds. First, promise me to cast off at once and for ever this wretched woman, who has been destroying your well-being both in this world and the next ; and then make up your mind at once to marry Miss Vernon, with whose fortune you must discharge this and the other similar liabilities which you have doubtless contracted."

"Marry Miss Vernon, sir? Why the time has arrived when you promised to give your sanction to my union with Miss Castleton, who will, ultimately, be the larger fortune of the two, and to whom my heart is already unalterably attached."

"*Your* heart, Charles? *your* attachment? And how do you think I am to believe this? And how much do you think your attachment is worth, when, during the time that your heart has been 'unalterably attached' to Miss Castleton, you have been living in open shame with

a common woman out of the streets. No, no, Charles, such conduct is totally inconsistent with anything like sincere, much more unalterable attachment. You have knocked that support from under you. You have no claim to consideration on the score of wounded feelings."

"Well, sir, but viewing the matter merely in a worldly point of view."

"On that score also, Charles, Miss Castleton is inadmissible. I have very good authority for informing you that an event will shortly occur, which will at once and for ever destroy all hopes of her inheriting the estates of her grandfather. But listen, Charles; so anxious was I for your happiness, and so much was I convinced that that happiness depended on your union with Miss Castleton, that, although I have every reason for believing my information to be correct, I had almost made up my mind to permit your marriage to take place, to content myself with the fortune she will inherit from her father, and still further to pinch myself, and cut down, in some measure, your brothers' and sisters' fortunes, in order that you might be ena-

bled to gratify the wishes of your heart, and, in some measure also, support your future position. But, providentially, your unworthiness has been brought to light, ere the sacrifice had been made for you, and ere I was committed to a course of which I should afterwards have bitterly repented. Any pecuniary sacrifice that I could make, and any fortune Miss Castleton could bring you, would be as nothing in comparison with the habit only of running into debt. And the feelings of your heart that I was so anxious to spare! Pshaw! I now know what they are made of."

Lennox hung his head, abashed and ashamed—"Forgive me, my dear, kind father," was all he could say.

"I will forgive you, Charles, but only on the conditions I have mentioned. Instant dismissal of this odious woman, and an immediate transference of your attentions to Miss Isabella Vernon, who, I have little doubt, in her triumph at winning you back to her side, will forgive you the attentions you have been paying to another."

"And what if I refuse your terms, Sir?"

sked Lennox, raising his head, his proud spirit rebelling against the dictation to which he was being subjected.

“ If you neglect the first of these injunctions, Sir, the penalty will be an immediate withdrawal of your allowance ; and I think you will find it difficult to maintain yourself and your vile paramour on your pay. If you refuse to comply with the second, I shall be under the painful necessity of making both Miss Castleton and Lady Barbara Pleydell acquainted with the circumstances which render you unworthy of aspiring to the hand of the pure and spotless creature whom you have thus forfeited !”

“ And may not I have some time to reflect upon a course of conduct which must so materially influence the welfare and happiness of my future life ?”

“ Yes ! I will not be unreasonable ; you dine at home to-day ?”

“ Yes, Sir.”

“ Well, then, you shall give me your final determination after dinner ; now you had better go for the present.”

Six hours ! It was not long to come to

a decision on a point of that nature ! After all, however, there was not much choice in the matter. The first injunction did not give him much trouble. Poor Mary must have gone whenever he married, and he saw at once that he had no alternative, but to comply at once with his father's commands. But the second was no ordinary sacrifice. To give up the fair and lovely Louisa, to whom his heart had attached itself with as much intensity as it was capable of attaching itself to anything, and to marry Isabella, to whom of late, owing mainly to her constant insinuations against Louisa, he had taken almost a dislike ; and this too at a moment when his father had become so much interested in his suit as to have declared that he would not have allowed the failure of her great expectations to have interfered with it. It was too provoking to have so narrowly missed such great happiness. For although at first he had only allowed himself to think of Louisa in the event of her becoming a great heiress, he had latterly become so enthralled by her attractions, that he would have been only too much delighted to have been

united to her on any terms. And now, by his own folly, his chance had been thrown away, and within sight of Heaven he felt himself compelled to forego all hope of entering it.

In spite, however, of his grief and reluctance, he felt that he was entirely in his father's power ; for that a hint from him of the way in which his son's spare time had been disposed of, would prove as effectual a barrier to his hopes of marrying Louisa as his own renunciation of her. Submission then was the only alternative ; but one glimmer of hope still remained—his father might have been misinformed about Miss Castleton's expectations ; and if he found that he had been in error, and that they were as good as ever, he might still relent.

Accordingly after dinner, when the ladies had retired, and Lord Lennox had begun the conversation by saying—

“ Well, Charles, what answer have you to give me respecting the two propositions that I made to you this morning ? ”

He replied, “ I submit entirely to your good pleasure, my dear father, and am quite ready to do what you require of me ; but

before I finally give up Miss Castleton, you will allow me to enquire if you are *quite* certain that your information about her is correct."

"Yes, Charles, I am quite certain, quite certain. I will tell you how I heard it—your mother had it from Mrs. Macdonald, who told her that she had just been told by a lady who had had it from a friend in Germany, who knew the Abbotshams very well, and was constantly in their society. Mrs. Macdonald said she had promised not to give the name of her informant, as she was a friend of Lady Barbara Pleydell, and thought that she might be annoyed at any one else's proclaiming what she chose to keep secret; but, if you like, I will ask Lady Barbara herself, though, by the bye, that would be useless; for I remember your mother told me that she had heard a lady, to whom Mrs. Macdonald had mentioned it, go up to Lady Barbara and ask her if it was true, and she did not deny it, but only said some unmeaning nonsense about not being authorised to confirm it, and so on; but depend upon it, if she had known it was not true, she would have taken pains



enough to have contradicted it, for she's sharp enough—quite sharp enough—I can see.”

“ Well, then, I am afraid it is too true,” said Lennox with a sigh, as he saw his last chance melt away from before him, “ and I must give up all hopes of being united to that most lovely, most amiable of beings.”

“ Yes, Charles, to be sure you must—to be sure you must—and mind you set about the other affair in good earnest, for you must be married this season in order to pay those bills, for I can promise you I am not going to pay your debts—I am not going to pay your debts.”

“ Indeed, Sir, I will try and obey you as I promised.”

“ Very well, Charles, mind you do—and begin at once ; you are going to the ball to-night I suppose ?”

“ Yes, Sir.”

“ Well, your mother will be there, and I shall tell her to bring me home an accurate account of the way in which you behave ; for we must have no more trifling—no more trifling—and now shall we go to the ladies ?”

## CHAPTER VIII.

ON that evening there was a grand ball, given by one of the leaders of the fashionable world to all the foreign royalty then staying in town, of whom there were at that time several. It was a ball to which Louisa had looked forward with more than ordinary pleasure, as she not only knew that Lennox would be there, but also that she should see several people whose names were familiar to her, and with whose personal appearance she had a natural curiosity to become acquainted.

Other engagements, however, had prevented her from arriving early, and when she ascended the stairs and entered the ball-room, her first look was to see whether Lennox was there, and if he were waiting for or expecting her. Her quick eye soon detected him. He was dancing with Isa-

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bella, but as she knew that he had always kept up more or less of intimacy with her, and was naturally desirous of wiling away the time till she arrived,—his doing so occasioned her neither surprise nor displeasure.

A quadrille had just been commenced, and, declining an invitation to dance, on the plea that they were too late and should not be able to get a *vis-à-vis*, she amused herself with looking at the distinguished individuals who were dancing at the top and bottom of the quadrille, and whose names she speedily learned from the unsuccessful candidate for her hand, who, though refused his dance, seemed to think that nothing could prevent his standing by her and talking to her, and that the fact that Lennox was otherwise engaged gave him too good an opportunity to be neglected. He seemed delighted to find that his superior information as to the foreigners gave him the means of interesting and amusing his fair companion.

His gratification, however, was short-lived, for Louisa's attention was quickly diverted to another channel by the cessa-

tion of the music, which announced the termination of the quadrille.

Now, she thought, Lennox would certainly come up to her. She had lost sight of him in the crowd, but expected every moment to see him emerge from it. At length her eye caught sight of him; but he was not coming towards her—he was leading Isabella Vernon into the refreshment-room. She supposed that he had not seen them arrive, and she knew that, even if he had, if Isabella had asked him to get her an ice he could not well refuse. She waited, therefore, patiently for his coming out again, but his stay was so protracted that the band had already struck up the first bar of a waltz before he appeared. At this moment the gentleman who had asked her for the last quadrille, and who had never left her side, begged that, if she were not engaged, she would do him the honour of dancing with him; and, as she could not refuse, she reluctantly gave up all hopes of Lennox for another quarter of an hour at least. As they were going, however, to take their place in the circle, they encountered him

returning from the tea-room with Isabella. She frankly held out her hand to him. He took it, coloured slightly, said something about her being very late that evening in arriving, and passed on. She thought his manner rather odd, and was somewhat surprised that he had not engaged her for the next dance; but still she did not think much of it, though her pre-occupation prevented her deriving much enjoyment from her waltz.

They had arrived so late that the doors of the supper-room, which was on the same floor with the ball-room, were now thrown open. Louisa thought that Lennox would certainly now come to offer her his arm. He always took her in to supper, and his habit of doing so was so well known, that other gentlemen seldom ventured to ask her. In this case, however, as he did not immediately make his appearance, her partner asked her if she would not follow the stream and go into supper with him? But she declined, on the plea that the crowd would be too great, and looked anxiously round for Lennox, but in vain!

When she returned to her aunt, the latter asked her if she had seen Mr. Lennox, and whether she was engaged to dance with him? and on being informed of the true state of the case, looked both anxious and annoyed. It confirmed her worst fears, namely, that Lennox had heard the rumour of the change in her views and expectations, and was going to back out of his courtship in consequence. How this rumour had got abroad was a perfect mystery to Lady Barbara. She felt quite certain that Lady Abbotsham had communicated with no one but herself. She was equally sure that she had not opened her lips on the subject to any living creature. She had done all she could to find out from Mrs. Macdonald the name of her informant, but that lady had been so well tutored by Mrs. Vernon that all her attempts were vain; for Mrs. Macdonald knew well enough that Mrs. Vernon's authority would be viewed with suspicion, and that to name her as her informant would be to throw discredit on her relation, and she therefore preserved inviolate the secrecy to which Mrs. Vernon

ad enjoined her—a consequence on which the crafty Isabella had calculated, when she fixed upon her as the person to disseminate the story that she had invented, and which she was no less surprised than pleased to find so faintly denied by Lady Barbara herself.

Meanwhile, time slipped away. While the majority were at supper, a few enthusiastic dancers were enjoying the comparative emptiness of the ball-room, and having made waltz all to themselves. But Lennox was not amongst these. He had then gone into supper—and gone without her. Perhaps, however, he had been the victim of circumstances. He had been dancing, and could not civilly leave his partner. Louisa was trying to convince herself that this had been the case, when, looking up, she saw him slowly emerging from the upper-room with Isabella Vernon on his arm. Had a snake stung her she could not have experienced a greater pang. She knew he had not been dancing the last dance with her. He must, then, have deliberately sought her for the express purpose of taking her in to supper, though

he was as well aware as Louisa herself that she would not go into the room until he came to claim her. He had, then, deliberately neglected her, and transferred his attentions to one whom she knew she had little reason to regard as a friend. She could not then think of the *cause* of such conduct ; she only felt overwhelmed at its existence. Her aunt, however, divined the cause only too well. She saw that Lennox's conduct was the result not of accident, or even of a casual pique or lover's quarrel, but that it was a deliberate act, the commencement of a well-arranged plan for breaking off the affair altogether.

Boiling with indignation, she would have liked to have carried off Louisa at once ; but, reflecting that the public would remark it, and would say that Miss Castleton would not stay at a ball unless Mr. Lennox was by her side all the time, she thought it better to stay for some time longer at least.

Louisa herself thought neither of going away nor of staying. Mechanically, she accepted the first person that asked her to dance ; and though she listened to his



words, and even replied to them, it seemed to be all in a dream. At last, suddenly and unexpectedly, Lennox came up to her and asked her to dance the next quadrille. His presence immediately recalled her to herself, and the indignation that she felt found an expression in the tone of her voice, as she informed him that she was engaged for the two next dances, and that after that she was going home.

Lennox bowed, made no reply, but retired; and this was all that passed between them on that eventful evening; an evening to which both had looked forward in the morning as likely to be productive of so much pleasure; and the greater part of which they had expected would be passed in the enjoyment of one another's society.

It is almost to be questioned whether Louisa or Lennox felt the more utterly wretched, as they returned to their respective homes that night after quitting the ball. Louisa, no doubt, was far more susceptible; her love was far deeper—her feelings far more easily wounded. But then all that had happened was to her so

utterly incomprehensible, that she was at first feeling the full extent of all her misfortune. She was, as it were, stunned and bewildered. She thought, as far as she was capable of thinking at all, that there must have been some extraordinary mistake; that she must in some way or another have hurt or offended Leander, and thereby caused this sudden change in his demeanour. If that were the case, she felt sure that the misunderstanding would not last. She was too conscious of the depth and truthfulness of her love, to believe that any lasting mischief could arise from any words or actions of hers, however misunderstood or misinterpreted. She blamed herself for having refused him when he did ask her to dance, as she thought that, had she not done so, they might have arrived at an understanding of the circumstances which had caused this sudden estrangement. She could not believe, however, that he would be deterred by that one refusal from asking her again on some future opportunity; and she again and again assured herself that all must shortly be explained, and that the wretch-

ness of that evening would be remembered only as we think of some horrid dream.

The worst feature in the case was, she thought, in her aunt's demeanour. Lady Barbara looked grave and sad, and did not make any attempt at consoling Louisa, or trying to laugh her out of her fears. In fact, she did not broach the subject. She felt that she could say little in the way of comfort, and she therefore thought it best to say nothing at all ; while Louisa, though she would willingly have opened her heart to her aunt, if she had been invited, felt a natural reluctance to be the first to start the conversation. The subject, therefore, was not mentioned between them, and this made Louisa think more seriously of the matter than she might otherwise have done. Her heart was very heavy, and, when she gained her own chamber, she dismissed her maid as soon as possible ; and, finding herself in solitude, she threw herself on her knees, buried her face in the bed-clothes, and wept bitterly.

Her tears seemed to afford a relief to her suffering heart ; and after a time she

became more composed, and, remaining on her knees, offered up her humble prayers that her present affliction might soon be turned into joy, or, if that were not possible, that she might have strength to bear up under it, and grace to improve it to her own ultimate advantage. And when she then sought her pillow, she was undoubtedly in a happier frame of mind, than the cause of all her grief, who lay tossing on his feverish couch, in vain courting slumber, and endeavouring to drown the sense of his present care in a temporary forgetfulness.

He had no consolatory hopes. He could not be blinded to the full extent of the consequences of his conduct. When he determined to obey his father's injunctions, he knew what was in store for him.

But he had not known how bitter the trial would be ; to see Louisa Castleton. to speak to her, to feel that by his own act alone was he kept from her, and then, worst of all, to learn by her peremptory refusal and altered demeanour that he had succeeded but too well in estranging her from him, was a bitter, bitter cup

indeed ; and then he had no hope for the future. He knew that the same course of conduct must be pursued day after day, and night after night, until the sacrifice was consummated, until an impassable gulf was established between him and Louisa, and an indissoluble knot connected him with her rival. He was almost tempted to break his promise to his father, to throw himself at Louisa's feet, tell her all, and entreat her forgiveness ; but then the thought of what that "all" implied presented itself to his mind, and he shrank from revealing to that pure and spotless spirit the wickedness, and yet more the weakness, of which he had been guilty. "No," he thought, "I must go through with it, and the sooner it is over the better." But during all this time he never thought of what she might be suffering ; he never considered the pain that his conduct must have caused her, utterly inexplicable as it must have appeared to her—no, his grief was all for himself. He had set his heart upon winning Louisa's affections, and he had won them. He had then set his heart upon gaining her hand,

and in that he was disappointed—and it was this disappointment that caused him so much grief and vexation. If Louisa had been a beautiful picture, or a matchless statue, that he had coveted and failed to obtain, he could not have thought less of the state of her feelings, or the wounds that his conduct was inflicting on them.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE result of Louisa's meditations on the subject, which of course almost exclusively occupied her thoughts, was, that when next she met Lennox she would as far as possible lay aside her pride, and would do all in her power, as far as was consistent with maidenly modesty, to pave the way for a reconciliation. She gave Lennox credit for feeling their estrangement as acutely as she did herself, and she felt confident, that, if nothing but a casual misunderstanding had been the cause of it, he would eagerly grasp at any opportunity for mutual explanation.

It was not long before the moment arrived for putting her resolutions into practice. The very next day she met Lennox at dinner at the house of a mutual friend, who had flattered herself that she

was doing the very kindest thing possible in inviting them to meet one another. The Pleydells and Louisa arrived first, but Lennox was not very long after them, and as he came up to pay his respects to the lady of the house, he found himself close to the sofa on which Louisa was sitting. When his eye met hers, a bright blush tinged her cheek, but she held out her hand frankly, and said—"How do you do, Mr. Lennox?" in a tone that was meant to convey to his mind the assurance, that she was quite ready to forgive and forget all that had passed when last they met.

It was not in human nature to resist such an appeal. Lennox eagerly responded to it, pressed the delicate little hand that was held out to welcome him, and seating himself by her side on the sofa, commenced, with sparkling eyes and heightened colour, an animated conversation. He did not, of course, touch upon the events of the late ball, but rattled on upon general topics in his usual lively and entertaining manner.

Louisa's heart bounded with joy—she thought that all misunderstanding was



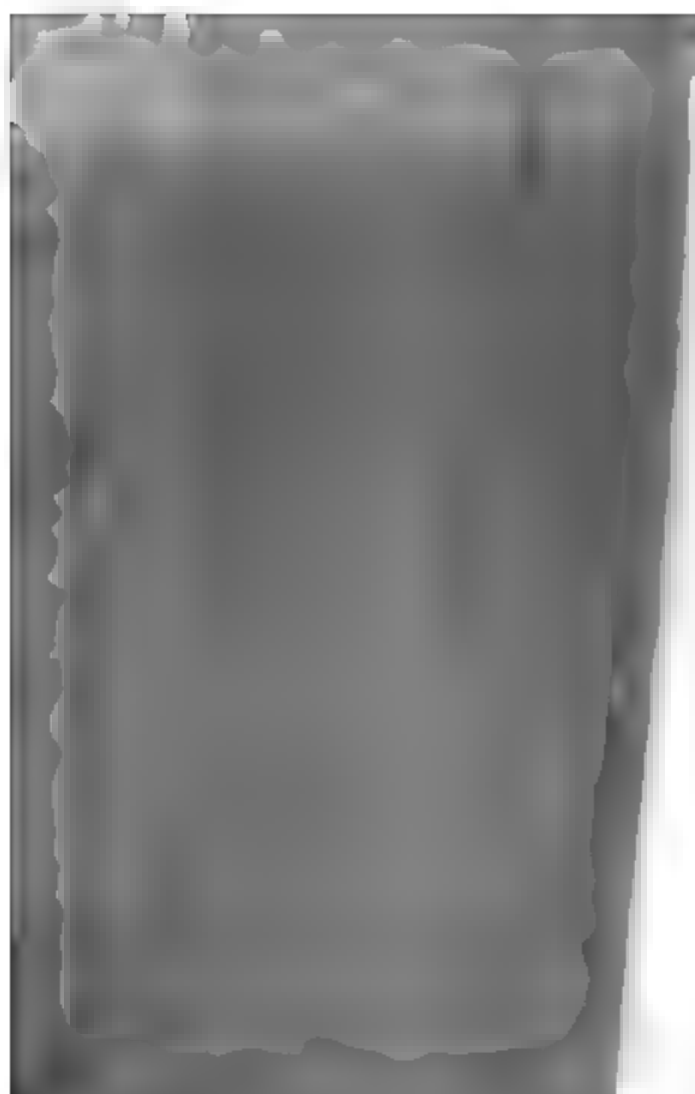
now at an end, and though she would have preferred that the cause of it should have been cleared up, she was well contented to bury it all in oblivion. Her happiness, however, was short-lived ; Lennox had not occupied the seat by her side for many minutes, ere Mrs. and Miss Vernon were announced, and starting like a frightened deer, he sprung from his seat on pretence of making room for Mrs. Vernon ; and when that lady had taken advantage of the opportunity by seating herself next to the dismayed Louisa, he turned round and addressed himself to Isabella, who, although Susan was generally permitted to accept the dinner invitations, had in this instance taken her place, having learnt that Lennox was to be of the party, and being determined to lose no opportunity of completing her conquest over him ; for so infatuated does vanity make us, that although she perceived very clearly that Lennox was actuated, in a great measure, by mercenary motives in his pursuit of Miss Castleton, she was convinced that his partiality to herself was of a purely disinterested nature—and that, if the prestige

of riches were removed from her rival, there could be no question but that Lennox's affections would be immediately transferred to herself.

Louisa, although sufficiently vexed at the loss of Lennox's society, and at his place being taken by a person, whom she disliked so much as Mrs. Vernon, did not apprehend that the annoyance would be a lasting one. Dinner would soon be announced, and then, she flattered herself, Lennox would assuredly offer her his arm. Isabella, however, had drawn him to a part of the room remote from the sofa, where Louisa was sitting, and near the door that opened on the staircase; and when dinner was announced, and the principal guests had been marshalled off, the hostess turned to tell Mr. Lennox to take Miss Castleton, and found that he was even then passing out of the room with Isabella on his arm. Poor Louisa! she had seen it all, and her heart sank within her at the evident preference he gave to her rival. During dinner they were placed opposite to each other, and Louisa's thoughts were terribly distracted and di-

verted from the conversation she was attempting to carry on with her neighbour, by her anxious watching of the couple opposite, where Lennox was evidently exerting all the conversational talents for which he was so celebrated, in order to entertain Isabella, who responded on her part with more than usual alacrity, being stimulated by the consciousness that the eye of her rival was upon her. Thus did the hours of dinner pass away ; and, when the gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, Lennox actually brushed by Louisa in order to seat himself by Isabella, who was at the other end of the room. A more marked neglect of the one, or a more direct preference for the other, could not have been exhibited ; and Louisa felt it bitterly, and felt it the more, as her hopes, that all her troubles were at an end, had been so strongly aroused, so short a time previous. She felt, too, that the eyes of the company were upon her, and that in the sight of all she was neglected, thrown over, cast off, by the man, whom she worshipped with all the fondness of her loving heart.

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herself, as heroically as she could. But alas ! for poor Louisa, she was no heroine, but a gentle, loving, tender-hearted girl, and though she contrived to suppress all outward show of emotion in the presence of others, many and bitter were the tears that she shed in the solitude of her own apartment.

## CHAPTER X.

LENNOX's task was but half accomplished. He had broken with Louisa ; and, hardest pang of all, he had a second time torn asunder the link that united them, just as her own fair hands had so gracefully repaired the fracture. Severe had been the struggle, but it had been borne—and he felt now that the die was cast, and he had completely shut the door of reconciliation with her against himself.

But there was yet another deed to do, from which he shrank even more than from that which he had just accomplished. He must see the frail companion of his lighter hours, and inform her that they must part—at once and for ever ; and he shrank from this, inasmuch as he knew that he should be met by prayers and entreaties that he would find it difficult to

withstand. In breaking with Louisa Castleton, he knew that whatever she might suffer, she would be an unresisting victim. Her own delicacy and the usages of society, would forbid a word, a look, of anguish or complaint to proceed from her towards him ; and Lennox was one of those who never think of the grief of others, unless it is forcibly brought before their eyes. He would see no signs of the pain he was about to inflict, and therefore he would take it for granted no pain existed. But with the unsophisticated child of nature it would be different. No maidenly scruples would ensure her silent acquiescence ; no fear of the world's censure would stifle the voice of her reproaches ; then, too, she was a mother, and all the force of her maternal love would plead against the desertion of her innocent infant. Lennox hated a scene, and a scene of an appalling nature he knew he should have to go through ; and therefore he feared, and therefore he postponed it.

At length, however, the conviction that it must be done some day—the annoyance of having the dread of it perpetually hang-

ing over him—and the reiterated injunctions of his father, combined to urge him to go through with his task at once ; and accordingly, a day or two after the dinner where he had finally broken with Louisa, he made his way with slow step and hanging head, like one going to execution, to the small lodging in King Street, where his unfortunate mistress resided.

Admitting himself with his latch-key, he entered the apartment on the ground-floor, which has been before presented to the reader, and discovered her in all the beauty of young maternity, sitting on a low chair, and bending over her baby, who was lying in her lap, apparently fast asleep. She was looking pale and delicate, from the effects of recent illness. All that had been coarse about her had disappeared, or been softened down, partly from that cause and partly from the length of time during which she had been relieved from manual labour, and occupied only in sedentary employments. As she sat thus, a slight flush tinged her pale cheek, while her soft hair escaped in natural curls from the coquettish little cap by



which it was surmounted, Lennox could not help thinking that in the highest circles of fashion he had seldom met with any thing more delicately beautiful than this poor village girl.

“Hush ! Lennox,” said she, raising her finger to her lips, and speaking in a whisper. “Hush ! tread softly and come and see your boy—how lovely he looks in his sleep.”

He stepped forward on tiptoe as he was desired, and looking over the mother’s shoulder, gazed upon the countenance of his sleeping infant. Yes, it was his own son—his first-born—the child who, had the bond of wedlock united him to its mother, would have been the heir to his title and his name—but whom he was now about to cast into the wide world, to perish miserably, or to become but too probably the companion of pickpockets or cut-throats. As he gazed on the innocent face of the babe, its soft cheeks tinged with a bright flush, reclining on its mother’s bosom, and its eyelids closed and fringed with long silken lashes, his heart smote him, and he felt to a certain extent conscious

of the iniquity of which he had been guilty.

“Is he not beautiful?” said Mary, raising her large eyes to his, glistening with pleasure. “Is he not lovely? and do you know, Lennox, infant as he is, I can see such a likeness to you. He has your forehead and your mouth exactly, and when he is asleep like this he is your very image; when his eyes are open, the likeness is not quite so striking, for his eyes are darker than yours, I fancy they are more like mine.”

As she spoke, the little fellow woke up, and displayed a pair of eyes, which his mother had truly observed were like hers—large and brilliant. He seemed to gaze with wonder at his father, for he fixed his eyes steadily upon him; and Lennox, conscious-stricken as he was, felt almost embarrassed by the steady stare of a baby a month old.

He moved his position, and sat down in a chair opposite.

“Oh, now do take him in your arms for a minute,” said the young mother; “you have never held him yet, and I

should so like to see you. Do, dear, to please me."

"But shan't I let him fall or hurt him?"

"Oh no! make a lap—there, that's right; now he can't fall out."

"But won't he be frightened?"

"No, he is too young for that; there," said she, as she placed the child on his knee, "now I can see you both at once. Oh, Lennox, he certainly is wonderfully like you—but you look serious, dear; is any thing the matter? Indeed you don't look well; but I was so taken up with shewing you our dear little one that I had not observed it before. What is it?—do tell me. You know if I can't do you any good, I may, at any rate, sympathize with you; and though you have great and rich friends and relations, there is none who loves you so dearly, and would do so much for you, as your poor Mary."

A tear glistened in her eye as she spoke, and the look she threw upon Lennox was so fond, so loving, that it almost diverted him from his purpose; and he thought he would give up all, and fly to some distant place where, unknown and unheeded, he

might live with the woman that loved him, and gain his bread by the sweat of his brow. But the image of Louisa Castleton presented itself to him, and he thought, "Have I had courage to give up all my hopes of winning that heavenly creature, and shall I shrink from sacrificing this earthly beauty? No—no—away with romance. I must go through with my task."

"I will tell you, Mary," he said aloud, "what it is that has grieved and distressed me; but first put the child away, and come and sit by me, for what I have to say concerns you; and may, I fear, grieve you as well as myself."

A vague dread smote the poor girl's heart, as she heard these words. She complied, however, without speaking, and laying the child into a small cradle, she placed it at her feet, where it was soon rocked to sleep. Then putting her hand timidly into that of Lennox, she said—

"Now then pray relieve my suspense, and tell me all about it."

"Well, Mary, I hardly know how to begin, or how to explain to you the situa-

tion in which I find myself; but, in the first place, you must know that I am by no means rich, and my allowance was barely sufficient to maintain myself, so that latterly the expense of maintaining you, and paying for the doctor and nurse during your illness, has got me into considerable difficulties."

"Is that all?" interrupted Mary, a gleam of pleasure lighting up her countenance, "I was afraid it was something much worse than that. Surely people will wait for their money some little time, and now I am strong again, I will work and get money, and support myself and baby, and perhaps pay something over to you into the bargain. I am not one of your fine ladies who can do nothing but spend their husband's money. I will earn some for you; you know I would have worked before, Lennox, but you never would let me; and now I am strong and healthy, I will work at my needle, take in fine washing, keep myself employed from morning till night, so that you shall not say I am an expense to you again. You know you said that that waistcoat I embroidered for you, would have cost you a couple of guineas if you

had bought it. If I do some more of them, and sell them, I shall get plenty of guineas, sha'n't I, dear?"

Lennox smiled at her enthusiasm. "Indeed, Mary, I do not doubt your willingness; and I hope you may, as you say, be able to support yourself, but you have not yet heard the worst of my story. One of the tradesmen from whom you have purchased some things on my credit, tired of applying ineffectually to me for his money, has sent in the bill to my father. He has been examining me on the subject, and has discovered the whole secret of our connexion."

Here he paused to see the effect of his communication.

"And what does he want you to do?" said she almost breathlessly.

"Now for it," thought Lennox; "I will let her know it all at once."

"He insists upon my parting from you, and marrying a young lady of fortune immediately."

"But you will not do it!" she almost screamed. "Oh, Lennox, you will not tear yourself from the heart that loves you—you will not desert your poor and innocent

child—you will not give yourself to the arms of another, and let me never, never see you more. Oh, Lennox, you cannot be so very, very cruel—your father cannot wish you to act thus. Oh, pray, pray do not leave me—I will be no expense to you, indeed I will not. I will work from morning to night, and will save what I can for the boy, so that he shall not plague you either ; but do not, do not leave us, or you will break my heart, indeed you will. Oh, you cannot know how devotedly I love you, or you would never even contemplate leaving me. Dear, dear Lennox, for God's sake have mercy upon me—or I shall go wild.”

Then she pressed her hand to her temples, as if she already felt the throbbings of delirium. Lennox was moved. He could not bear to witness her distress. A tear rose to his eye—he took her hand, and pressed it fondly without speaking. Encouraged by the gesture the poor girl rose from her chair, threw her arms round his neck, hid her face in his bosom, and burst into a flood of tears.

“ Hush, dear, hush ! be composed, there is a good girl. Believe me I would not part

from you without an inevitable necessity. Perhaps after all our parting need be only temporary—you will let me know where you are, and when the present storm has blown over, perhaps we may meet again."

"Oh, Lennox, do not, do not cast me off. You know what you have made me—you know that I have sacrificed everything, honour, virtue, my hopes here and hereafter to you—you have been my all in all, if I lose you, I am indeed a castaway."

"But we will meet again."

"But where am I to go?—what is to become of me?—where shall I lay my aching head, and where shall I find a shelter for that helpless child? Alas! it is early in his young life, for his troubles to begin. See how sweetly he is slumbering, and how beautiful he looks in his sleep. Oh, Lennox, can you leave him to perish?"

"Perish!" replied Lennox, who was beginning to be weary of the scene, and who saw no other way out of it but by losing his temper. "Perish! who wants him to perish? you were just saying that you could support yourself and him too by your own industry. Why then should you perish?"



All that you have to do is to leave this and seek some other lodging. I will pay your rent up to this day week, and then you must depart."

"Oh! Lennox, do not speak so to me. I have always been a humble, faithful, and obedient companion to you. I have never transgressed your commands. I have never had a thought to which you could have objected. Many a long and weary hour have I spent alone, waiting for you, my only solace, when you have been detained by other engagements; and I never murmured. I have never opposed any of your plans, or thwarted any of your wishes. And now grant me this one only request. Do not cast me off thus!—do not treat me worse than you would a dog!" And here she sank upon her knees at his feet, and, clasping her hands, gazed into his face with streaming eyes, in the vain hope of finding some signs of relenting. But no! Lennox's hour of weakness was past, and, rising from his chair, he replied—

"It cannot be, Mary. Till this day week you may remain here, after that you

must seek some other abode. And now farewell—I may not see you more !”

“ Not see me again !” she exclaimed, clasping his knees so as to avert his progress—“ not even during the week that remains ? Why—oh ! why is this ? What have I done to deserve such cruelty ?”

“ Mary ! I promised my father that I would see you once, and but once, to bid you farewell. That promise I must keep, and therefore I repeat I must see you no more. Besides, knowing that we are to part, our meetings would only be the causes of additional pain to both of us ; for, believe me,” he added, in a softened tone, “ I do feel this separation most acutely ; and now then, adieu !”

As he spoke he stooped down, imprinted a long kiss upon her forehead, and strove to disengage himself from her clinging embrace. It was not so difficult as he expected ; her hands relaxed their hold, and, ere Lennox reached the door, the unfortunate victim of his selfishness and cruelty had sunk motionless upon the floor. He turned and looked. Yes, there lay the frail and erring, but loving girl, who had

sacrificed her all for him. Faithless had she been to herself and to her duty, but true and faithful to him. Her only crime had been the result of his acts—dark and deep, it doubtless was—but was he not the more culpable of the two? The crime had been shared between them, but who had been the instigator of it? There she lay, the victim of her own weakness and of his unruly passions; and there, by her side, lay her unconscious infant, sleeping the sweet sleep of innocence, and ignorant how soon the dread doom was to be enforced, that the sins of the parents should be visited upon the children. There they lay, stricken guilt and unconscious innocence, both equally motionless. As he gazed upon them once more, a tear rose unbidden to his eye; but muttering to himself “It is better thus,” he turned away, and passing through the door, closed it upon the heartrending scene he had just witnessed.

Then, summoning the landlady, he informed her that the apartments would only be required for another week, the rent of which he paid in advance. He

then quitted the house, and fortunate it was for the unhappy girl he had deserted that her swoon still continued, or the sound of the street door closing after him for the last time would have carried a pang to her heart that it was ill able to support.

## CHAPTER XI.

SOME days had elapsed since Louisa Castleton's attempt at reconciliation with Lennox had so unfortunately failed ; and during this time they had frequently met, but, as might have been expected, every meeting only served still further to widen the breach that had been made between them. Lennox now not only never asked her to dance, but did not even speak to her. A cold and formal bow was the only sign of recognition that ever passed between them. Even to Lennox this state of things was, for some time, productive of exquisite pain. He could not reconcile himself to seeing that hand which he had so often claimed as his own, now given to many whom his pretensions had hitherto kept at a distance, for Louisa was spared the mortification of feeling herself neg-



those tones, which formerly were lavished only upon her, now given wholly to another, and that other one whom she could not but feel was inferior to her in every point of view. She racked her brains in vain to discover the cause of the change. She felt that no change had taken place in her. She was the same as ever, and her nature had always been so truthful and candid, that she felt certain there was no secret trait in her character that could have been so long concealed from him, and which, being detected, produced his present aversion to her. If he had grown gradually less and less attentive, and had by degrees transferred his affections from herself to her rival, she would have thought that he had become tired of her, and, with the fickleness of his sex, had sought a fresh excitement in a new conquest. But the change in his demeanour had been so sudden, that this explanation could not be admitted ; and this suddenness gave her still a few sparks of hope with which to comfort herself. There must be some cause for this conduct. Unable to divine an adequate one, she could only

imagine that he had been deceived, and led to believe in one where none really existed. And the simultaneous transfer of his attentions to Isabella Vernon served both to corroborate this idea, and to point out the author of this deception. And this, undoubtedly, afforded some hope. Although she did not understand Latin, she had great faith in the maxim "*Magna est veritas et prevalebit.*" And she thought in course of time the mystery must be cleared up, the deceiver exposed, and Lennox restored to her side once more. For this reason, she was glad that she had made the advance that she had towards a reconciliation. It would encourage Lennox, when he did discover the error, to do the same, and would prevent him from thinking that it was too late to retrace his steps. There was, of course, the chance that Lennox might become inextricably entangled with Isabella ere he discovered his mistake; but she did not think that probable. She could hardly believe that one who had so lately been her devoted admirer, could bring himself actually and deliberately to bind himself for life to ano-



ther. And she could hardly think that Isabella herself would condescend to accept such an offer. A love such as that would imply, could be but of mushroom growth ; and she felt conscious herself that, were she the object of a similar proposal, she would reject the offer with scorn.

Such had been the state of Louisa's feelings during the days that had elapsed since the hopes that had been so brightly kindled were so rudely extinguished. The termination of her sojourn in town was now approaching. The London season was drawing to a close. The weather, which was fine and hot, was making even professed Londoners long for a little country air, and balls and *soirées* were again comparatively deserted in favour of breakfasts, Vauxhall parties, Richmond trips, and Greenwich dinners.

The day of the last breakfast that was to occur while Louisa was in town had now arrived. As she and her aunt drove towards the house, the former could not help drawing a contrast between her present feelings and those which she had experienced on the last occasion, when she

had attended a breakfast at the same house just one fortnight before. Then she had gone in the full hope and expectation of meeting Lennox—with the conviction that he would be ready to welcome her on her arrival, and would attach himself to her side during the greater part of her stay. Now she thought it most probable, it is true, that she should meet him ; but she should not hear the tones of his voice, or, if she did, it would only be while he was addressing another. Another would be hanging, perhaps, on his arm, and would receive all the care and attention which had heretofore been devoted to herself.

As these thoughts were passing through her mind, she looked up and saw Lennox driving rapidly past them in his cab. He bowed coldly, and was gone.

The blinding tears rushed to the poor girl's eyes. Even so, last time, had he passed them—but how different had been the bow of recognition ! Where was now the meaning smile, the heart-searching glance, the impressive gesture ? Gone, all gone ! Then he was hurrying to be in time to receive her—now he was probably has-

tening to overtake the equipage of her rival. She leaned back in the carriage, and put her handkerchief to her eyes. Her aunt pressed her hand in token of sympathy, but at the same time whispered to her,—

“Control yourself, my dear, or you will be observed.”

Louisa returned the pressure, wiped away the remaining drops, and steeled herself to bear with Spartan fortitude the trial that she knew awaited her.

When they had arrived at the house, and having paid their respects to the noble hostess, had passed on to the verandah, which overlooked the garden, they found, as she had expected, Mrs. Vernon and Isabella, who had just arrived, and were standing with Lennox in front of the windows, looking down upon the gay scene below them. Salutations were coldly interchanged, for Lady Barbara's chilling reserve was proof against even Mrs. Vernon's forwardness; and then, a report reaching them that some foreign singers were going to give a specimen of their powers at the further extremity of the garden, Lennox offered his arm to conduct Isabella to the spot. Louisa

saw them depart with an aching heart. It was just so that he was wont to seize upon the first pretext for withdrawing her from the wing of her too confiding *chaperone*. She was not, however, long suffered to indulge in her own meditations, for Lord Augustus Fitzosborne coming up, asked her if she would not allow him to be her escort in the same direction.

“ Thank you, no ! ” she replied ; “ I have heard them before ; ” but then, seeing that the young man looked disappointed, she added, “ however, they may not sing the same airs this time, so if you please I shall be very glad to come ; ” and she placed her hand on Lord Augustus’s arm, who for once in his life felt quite at a loss for something to say. He, in common with the rest of the world, had considered Lennox’s marriage with Miss Castleton as an *affaire arrangée* ; his own nascent regard for her had been somewhat rudely nipped in the bud, but so early that he had been quite content to witness the triumph of his rival, if rival he could be called, when actual rivalry there was none. Being, however, himself a good-hearted though weak

and vain young man, he had witnessed Lennox's conduct with sorrow and indignation. To win the heart of so fair a creature, and then so ruthlessly to desert her, shocked his sense both of honour and humanity, and he regarded Louisa with the sincerest pity and sympathy. The feeling uppermost in his mind at the moment when he offered her his arm was indignation at Lennox's neglect, and an ardent desire to afford her some consolation for it ; and it was not until they were fairly embarked in their walk across the lawn, that the extreme difficulty of his self-imposed task occurred to him. He had tact enough to know that to let a young lady perceive that the neglect of a former lover had rendered her an object of pity was not the best way of affording her consolation, while at the same time his head and heart were both so occupied with his feelings of compassion, that he knew not how to converse on ordinary topics. They walked for some time, therefore, without speaking, till Louisa, who began to feel the silence embarrassing, forced herself to speak ; and, by way of

saying something, asked him if he was going to the opera that night ?

“ Yes,” said he, “ I believe I am. I promised to go with that Mr. Grote whom I met at Lord Stapleford’s on that occasion when I first had the happiness of making your acquaintance.”

Poor Louisa ! what a flood of recollections did the mention of that happy time recall to her mind. She made no reply, and neither of them spoke until they arrived at the singers, who were just commencing a new air—one of those plaintive melodies, which even unaccompanied by words, tell of sorrow and anguish, and often bring the tears to the eyes of those who are endued with a sensitive disposition. The words, however, in this case were Italian, and Louisa, who was very conversant with the language, could understand them readily.

They were the wailings of a broken spirit, and expressed the anguish of a young wife, where the husband has been carried off by the conscription to serve in the armies of his sovereign, and whom she will not again see for many a long year ; if, in-

deed, he ever returns alive to his humble home. Many a tear rose to the eye of the gay and the happy as they listened to the tale of woe ; and Louisa's overcharged heart swelled almost to bursting at the fictitious sorrows of another.

“ And yet,” she said to herself, “ her lot was happier than mine. Better, far better, is any amount of bodily separation from the beloved one, than the cruel void that divides the hearts. Oh, Lennox, if you would but leave me with the assurance that you loved me again as once you did, cheerfully would I bid you farewell, and hopefully would I look forward to the time, however distant, of our re-union.”

The song ended, the crowd began to disperse, and Louisa begged Lord Augustus to re-conduct her to her aunt. They returned accordingly to the spot where they had left her, but found she was no longer there ; a lady who was standing by informed them that Lady Barbara had gone to have some strawberries and cream at a refreshment table, which was laid out at the other end of the lawn. Thither

accordingly they repaired in quest of her; but were told, when they arrived, that she had gone to look at the flower-garden.

From the spot where they then were, the shortest way to the flower-garden lay along a narrow enclosed walk, concealed by a thick hedge from the open lawn, and well known to all lovers, whether in earnest or sport, as a first-rate place for a flirtation, unseen by mamma, or even for a proposal with her full concurrence. Lennox had ere this persuaded Louisa to accompany him down this sequestered path, and on the last occasion of her doing so a proposal had seemed almost to tremble on his lips. Lady Barbara had, in fact, said jocosely to her niece, as they were returning home:—"The next time Mr. Lennox takes you into that 'lovers' walk,' I shall expect to hear that he has spoken out like a man."

As Lord Augustus prepared to lead her down this path, these recollections rushed upon poor Louisa's mind, and she was on the point of entreating him to go the other way to the flower-garden. She felt, how-



ever, too much at a loss for a reason, in case he should ask for one, to urge her objection ; and accordingly, with a beating heart, she allowed herself to be drawn into the solitary gloom of the shady walk. She determined not to think, and exerted herself to the utmost to converse with her companion on indifferent topics. She was not very successful, however ; while the heart is full but of one subject, it is so hard for the tongue to find utterance for words on any other ! A silence accordingly soon prevailed, and Louisa was greatly relieved at seeing her aunt advancing to meet her from the opposite end.

Just at that moment she fancied she heard voices close to her. She looked round, but no one was in sight, and she concluded that the voices proceeded from the open lawn, from which they were only divided by the thickness of the hedge, which lay on their right hand. Another instant showed her that her surmise was erroneous ; for as they advanced, they perceived a recess in the bushes on their left, filled by a rustic seat, which was now

occupied by two persons, a lady and gentleman, from whom the voices she had heard proceeded.

The gentleman was bending forward in an impassioned attitude, clasping one of the lady's hands in both of his own, and gazing up into her face with apparent rapture, while with a voice which thrilled through every fibre of the unintentional intruder, he said,—

“Then at last you are indeed my own, my precious, priceless Isabella?”

The sudden start given by poor Louisa, on becoming so suddenly and so unexpectedly a witness to this scene, made them both conscious that they were no longer alone. Lennox, for it was he, blushed crimson, and springing to his feet, seemed undecided how to act, and more than half inclined to run away; while Isabella, without changing colour, cast a glance of unmingled triumph on her former rival. For a moment Louisa stopped, irresolute whether to go or turn back;—then, seeing her aunt advancing towards her, she thought it best to go on, and saying in a low voice to Lord Augustus the

one word "come," they hastily passed on, when Lennox, offering his arm to Isabella, proceeded down the walk in the opposite direction.

Wretched, miserable Louisa ! Never in her life had she experienced anything like the agony of that moment. It was now all over—her fate was sealed—and he, whom she adored with all the ardour of a loving heart, was now the affianced husband of another. She could not have believed that she could have undergone such an exquisite pang without losing her consciousness, but it is strange what we can sometimes endure, and endure unflinchingly ; and as she advanced to meet her aunt, her step was as steady, her eye as bright, as if the scene which she had just witnessed had been acted between parties who were unknown or indifferent to her. It is true, her cheek was deadly pale, and her lips well nigh as colourless ; but her aunt, who had seen Lennox and Isabella emerge from what she considered a side-walk, thought that the meeting with them had been the cause of these symptoms of emotion.

The voice, however, is a great tell-tale. There is none of our organs so little under our own control, when excited by violent emotion; and as Louisa endeavoured to address her aunt, the tongue appeared to cleave to the roof of her mouth, and it was with difficulty that she could articulate—she managed, however, to murmur—

“Dear aunt, I am so very tired, and if you did not much mind going away so early, I should like to go home at once.”

“Certainly, my dear,” replied her aunt. “Lord Augustus, would you do us the still further favour of asking for our carriage?”

As soon as the young man was gone, and they were alone together, Lady Barbara, turning to her niece, said—

“Has anything *particular* occurred, my darling, to make you wish to go home so soon?”

Louisa’s voice was almost choked, as she replied—

“I have just heard him address Isabella Vernon as her accepted lover.”

“My poor, poor child!” said Lady Barbara, tenderly. “But we will not speak of it now, my love—exert yourself a little

while longer, and keep up appearances till Lord Augustus has got us the carriage, and then we will talk it all over, for I have much to say to you on the subject."

It would have been far easier for Louisa to have obeyed her aunt's injunctions, had she felt more of anger at Lennox's conduct. But she was so confident that he must still be the victim of some mysterious deception, that her feelings were far more of sorrow than of anger, of sorrow for herself, and of pity for him; for she knew that he could not really love Isabella Vernon; she knew that she could never make him happy—she feared that some time, sooner or later, he would bitterly repent of that day's work. It was therefore with the utmost difficulty that she could restrain the flood of tears that seemed to press so heavily on her eyes, and great indeed was her relief when they met Lord Augustus, who informed them that their carriage was actually waiting. The door was closed, she drew down the blinds, and, throwing herself far back in the carriage, gave way to a passion of

tears, which her aunt did not for some time attempt to check ; at last she said—

“ Be more composed, my dear, and listen to me ; for I have some things to say, which may, I think, in some degree lessen your grief, though it will not diminish the indignation that you doubtless feel against the heartless man who has so dishonourably trifled with your affections.”

“ Oh no, aunt, indeed, I feel no indignation against him. I am sure he has been the victim of some base deception.”

“ I fear not,” replied her aunt ; “ I fear that he has been basely deceiving you—that he has feigned a love for you, that he did not feel, impelled by mercenary motives ; and that now he has learnt, how I know not, that your prospects are somewhat changed, he has transferred his attentions to that heartless girl, or rather to the £40,000 which she represents in his eyes.”

“ I do not understand, aunt ; what do you mean ?”

“ As long as it was probable that you would inherit my father's property, you

possessed a greater charm in Mr. Lennox's eyes than any of your rivals ; but now that your uncle seems likely himself to be blessed with an heir, Miss Vernon's £40,000 render her the more attractive of the two."

" Oh ! aunt, impossible—he never could have been so base. Besides, how could he hear of any change in my prospects ? I never heard of it even myself till this moment."

" How he heard it is a mystery—I have known it for some little time ; but your aunt told me that she had not mentioned the matter to an individual besides myself. I never said a word about it even to you, as I was in hopes you would have been engaged to Mr. Lennox before the story got wind—but to my very great surprise, I found that it was already in circulation ; and simultaneously with that report getting about, his manner to you became changed. I think, then, that you will allow that there is a strong probability that his attachment to you partook of a mercenary character, and, that being the case, you will not find it difficult to

console yourself for the desertion of so unworthy a lover."

This argument, however, did not bring so much consolation to Louisa's mind as Lady Barbara seemed to expect. To be deserted is bad enough, but to discover that one never has been loved is surely worse—for, however changed our feelings may have become, there is always a sweetness and a consolation in the reflection that we have at one time been an object of affection. The eye may be altered, but it is gratifying to think that it once gazed upon us with love. The hand may now be withheld, but it pleases us to remember that it once pressed ours with tenderness. It was, therefore, with increased bitterness of spirit, that she groaned aloud, and burst into a fresh flood of tears. It may seem strange that after witnessing Lennox's conduct for so many days, after seeing his desertion of herself, and his devotion to Isabella, she should have been overcome by the knowledge that the event had taken place, to which his conduct seemed so naturally to tend. But up to this moment she had never realized to herself



the fact, that she was finally and for ever deprived of all hope of Lennox's affection—she had been grieved, nay, cruelly pained by his desertion of her—her existence for the last few days had been embittered by it—but she had always consoled herself with the belief that so unnatural a state of things must soon come to an end ; that the mystery would soon be cleared up, and Lennox would be again at her feet. But now, all hopes were shut out ; and the solution which her aunt gave of the mystery was of all others 'the most unsatisfactory. The more she pondered over it, however, the more incredible she found it. It was not that Lennox had paid her attention, and signified his admiration by words ; his looks, his tones, had all carried with them the conviction that he loved her for herself alone. That the change in her circumstances might have induced him to give her up, she thought was possible—but that he had loved her once, she thought she must always believe, and she felt an almost equal conviction that he did not really love Isabella Vernon ; and when she reflected on the words

she had so lately heard him addressing to her, she flattered herself that, loving as those words were, there was something different in the tone of his voice from that with which it would have been endued had she been the object addressed.

But all these reflections served but to add to her unhappiness. She felt that she had been sacrificed to a passion for wealth unworthy of her lover, and that his lot, as well as her own, would too probably be rendered permanently wretched by the result of this, his want of principle. She blushed for herself, she blushed for him—for herself that she should have given her heart to one who valued it less than the riches of this world—for him, that so base a passion as the love of money should exercise so great a dominion over him.

Whichever way she turned she could find no consolation, save in the way which her aunt wished to close against her, that of reflecting that at one time he did love her, and that, had she possessed that wealth which he seemed to think so necessary, she would have been preferred before all

her competitors. But slight, indeed, was the comfort to be derived from this source, and many and bitter were the tears she shed in the solitude of her own apartment, as on every side the horizon of her future appeared dark and gloomy, and no glimmer of hope remained to cheer her on the weary path of life.

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## CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Ferdinand Castleton entered the breakfast-room at Shelbridge Rectory, two days after the occurrence of the events mentioned in the last chapter, Wentworth, who ever since Louisa's departure had been an inmate of the Rectory, observed that an air of unusual sadness overspread his features, and that his eyes even bore traces of recent tears. His sympathy was immediately aroused, and his anxiety for Louisa's welfare naturally suggesting to his mind that some misfortune had befallen her, he exclaimed—

“ I fear, Mr. Castleton, you have heard some bad news. Has anything happened to Miss Castleton ? ”

“ I have, indeed, heard bad news, Wentworth, and in connection with her too. But she is well, as far as bodily health is concerned. ”

He said no more, and Wentworth's delicacy prevented him from pressing any more questions.

Mr. Castleton, however, after a short silence, resumed—"Indeed, Wentworth, I do not know why I should conceal anything from you, though the matter is of that delicate nature that I doubt whether Louisa would approve of my revealing it to you. But the fact is, that that Mr. Lennox, whom you remember, has been paying her great attentions during the whole season, and now, just at the close, without any acknowledged reason, he has deserted her, and engaged himself to marry some one else—no other, in fact, than our lively young neighbour, Miss Isabella Vernon, of Moor Park. And my poor child naturally feels hurt and pained at such heartless conduct from one who had endeavoured, and, I fear, but too successfully, to gain her young affections."

"What a villain!" exclaimed Wentworth, reddening with indignation; "but can you not guess at all at his motives?"

"Barbara tells me," replied Mr. Castleton, "that there is now a probability of

a direct heir to Stapleford Castle, an event at which, under any other circumstances, I should be heartily rejoiced ; but the rumour of which appears to have scared this young fortune-hunter, and induced him to act in a manner which I cannot but consider highly dishonourable. But here is Barbara's letter—I have no objection to your reading it ;” and he accordingly handed to him the letter he had just received from Lady Barbara, which gave a pretty accurate detail of the events which had led to the final catastrophe, interspersed with a good many reflections of her own upon the conduct both of Lennox and the Vernons. As he read the recital his heart swelled with grief at the thought of the suffering and mortification to which its idol had been exposed ; and he most disinterestedly regretted the issue of Lennox's courtship, though he could not prevent a spark of selfish pleasure from kindling in his bosom as he reflected that now that all hopes in that quarter were at an end—now that her love for him had probably turned to hatred or contempt, she might be disposed

to regard with favour one whose disinterested attachment absence, distance, repulse itself had in no-wise diminished. He was not the man to conceal his feelings on this subject from Mr. Castleton, to whom the whole course of his unfortunate attachment had been laid open ; and he accordingly said, as he returned the letter—

“ It is, indeed, a sad story, Mr. Castleton : and I trust I need not assure you of my unfeigned sorrow at what has occurred. I will not, however, conceal from you that it has once more kindled a spark of hope in my bosom, and induced me to think that at some future time, when the wound so recently inflicted has been healed, Miss Castleton will look with more favour than hitherto on the suit of one who, whatever his other demerits may be, has never ceased to love her with unswerving constancy. It may, perhaps, be gratifying to her wounded spirit to find that there are those who can appreciate her qualities, and that the heartless conduct she has experienced from him who had most reason to be grateful to her for her good opinion, will

form a solitary exception to the treatment she may look for from the more worthy of our sex. Do you still think I have no chance?" he continued, seeing that Mr. Castleton looked grave, and apparently gave him no encouragement.

"Indeed, Wentworth, it is impossible to say. I was certainly thinking of a passage in the letter I have received from the dear girl herself, in which she declares that she will never marry any one; but time effects great changes, and, as you say, when the wound, which at present smarts so cruelly, has been partially healed, she may think differently. I would not, however, build my hopes too high. Louisa is a girl of deep and strong affections. You may depend upon it she has not loved lightly; and it may be feared that in tearing out of her heart her unhappy passion for this unworthy object, she may with it destroy all capability of loving another. However, as your hopes seem excited, I suppose you will not mind seeing her again now, and will not be in such a hurry to leave me. You need not go to your new living for above two months yet. Stay here a little longer, and perhaps your



unobtrusive attentions may work their way even thus early. I shall go to town immediately, and bring Louisa back here as soon as possible. You will stay here, at any rate, and welcome her return, will you not?"

"It would be a great pleasure to me to do so," replied Wentworth, "if you thought that it would not be unpleasing to Miss Castleton to meet me after what has passed between us. She might not wish that I, who have been rejected by her so lately, should be a witness to her own mortification."

"I do not think that," said Mrs. Castleton; "I have too good an opinion of Louisa, and I am sure she has too good an opinion of you, for such a thought to find place. You have paid her the greatest compliment that a man can pay to a woman; she did not seek to attract you, and most assuredly did not triumph over your repulse. Her feelings towards you, therefore, can only be those of friendship and gratitude, while it will never enter her head to suspect that yours towards her can consist of anything but affectionate

sympathy. However, to remove your scruples, you may make some preparations for departure, and I will sound my daughter on the subject, and let you know if I find that she has any dread of meeting you ; but I feel very sure that such will not be the case, and that your society, if it reminds her at all of the position in which you placed yourself towards her, will only inspire the pleasing thought, that she is not rejected by all, and that, if she chose, she might command for life the devotion of at least one true and faithful heart."

It was, therefore, arranged that Wentworth should hold himself in readiness to be off ; but that, unless he received an intimation from Mr. Castleton that his departure was desirable, he might remain until after Louisa's return, when he would be able to judge for himself how far his presence would be productive of happiness, or the contrary, to both parties.

The following day being Sunday, it was not possible for Mr. Castleton to journey, but on the Monday morning he once more traversed the road to the W—— station on his way to town.

It was a dark and cloudy, though intensely hot morning. Everything was indicative of a storm ; the heavy clouds charged with rain swept low down the hill sides, and the misty atmosphere concealed all but very near objects from view. The road was the same as ever—but, instead of affording beautiful views and commanding prospects, it seemed to lie through a country comparatively tame, so completely were its distinguishing features concealed and disguised. The horses appeared to feel the depressing influence of the weather ; instead of pressing on eagerly and gaily, they laboured along slowly with hanging heads and lack-lustre eyes, and required more than one application of the whip to remind them that they, in their sphere, had a duty to perform which must not be neglected, though the circumstances were more than usually unfavourable.

It is not surprising that Ferdinand should suffer from such general depressing influences. Silently and sadly did he drive, and would have let his horses go what pace they pleased, had not the ever-pre

sent necessity, of "being in time for the train," roused him to exertion.

"How different," he thought, "is this sad journey from that which I had looked forward to as being so happy, when I was to go and bring back my beloved daughter once more. When I travelled this way on my return from leaving her in London, I already looked forward to the joy with which I should traverse it on this occasion; and now I am far more unhappy that I was at that time—now I seem to have nothing to look forward to—and yet why should I despair? I know not what good may not be in store for me, and for her—I know that every trial well supported brings its reward in the next world, even if it fails to do so in this one; and even as now, when I look around me, I know that in this direction lies a beauteous valley, in that arises a majestic and picturesque hill, though both are hidden from my sight by this all-pervading haze, so may I safely affirm that, although all around looks dark and gloomy, bright and happy prospects may yet be destined to open upon us. It is

true that, as before this natural haze is cleared away a storm will probably occur, so our path to happiness may lie through yet severer trials. But be that as it may, though rude may be the storm, glorious will be the prospect that will await us at last."

Cheering himself as much as possible with such thoughts as these, he pressed forward to his destination.

When he arrived in town he was much struck with the altered appearance of his daughter ; a fortnight's anxiety, suspense, and sorrow, followed by the acute misery of the last few days, had made great changes in the fair and lovely countenance which he had last seen radiant with hope and excitement. It was not, however, that her beauty was diminished—its character was somewhat altered, it is true—but what was lost in roundness of outline and freshness of complexion was more than regained in that increased spirituality of expression which only mental discipline will give, and which told of suffering indeed—but of suffering well endured, and aid sought where alone it can be found.

In the father's eyes, however, this increased loveliness by no means compensated for the impaired health which the change denoted, and he trembled as he thought that though the spirit were indeed strong, the flesh might be weak ; and that, though his beloved child might bravely bear her trials, her physical strength might be unequal to a protracted endurance of them. He concealed his fears, however, and pressing her to his bosom loaded her with kisses ; while she, laying her head on that shoulder which had supported her in infancy, poured forth the sorrows of her overcharged heart in a silent though copious flood of tears.

" He comforted, my beloved one," said Ferdinand, as soon as he could command his voice, " he comforted. Your trial has indeed been severe ; and I know not how to console you, save in the way you yourself pointed out in your beautiful letter to me. I saw by that letter that you had not forgotten where you should look for comfort. Remember that every thing is doubtless ordained for the best, and that it is not for us poor blind mortals to murmur

at the dispensations of that all-wise Being, who has assured us that the very hairs of our head are numbered, and who will most undoubtedly direct all things for the ultimate benefit of those who faithfully and diligently serve him. At the same time it is not forbidden to us to feel natural grief or sorrow when his chastisements fall heavily on us. I do not therefore bid you not to weep, my precious daughter; but let your grief be moderated, and remember that I too have suffered, and my sufferings perhaps have been severer than those under which you are even now smarting, and yet I have overcome the trial. I have passed a cheerful, contented and happy life, and, I trust, though deprived of my greatest earthly treasure, I have not been ungrateful for the others that have been left to me, of which you, my darling daughter, are the chief. That you may long be spared to be the comfort and happiness of your loving parent is his most earnest wish and prayer. Strive, then, to overcome your sorrow, and, believe me, there will be many happy days yet in store for us, in which we may be the

source of consolation and happiness to each other.

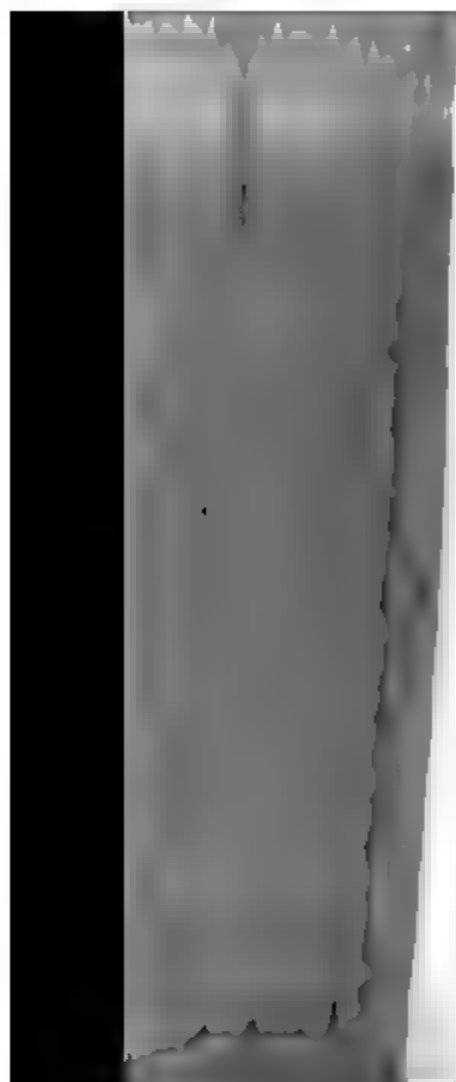
"I will, indeed I will, dear papa," said Louisa, as her tears flowed more gently, and more for him than for herself; but before we dismiss this painful subject tell me one thing. "Do you think, with my aunt, that he never really cared for me? or will you let me cherish the belief that, at one time at least, I was mistress of his affections? I cannot say how much happier I should be, if I were assured of this."

"Not having witnessed his manner to you, my dear, I am not really competent to give much of an opinion. I think, however, that your view of the case is a very plausible one, and I confess I should be more inclined to trust to your penetration, in this instance, than to that of your aunt Barbara. I think it possible, too, that his father may have interfered, and that he may have been less of a free agent in this business than he has appeared to be. I have no hesitation therefore in saying, that I see no reason why you should be deprived of this reflection, which, I can well understand, is productive of great comfort



to you, and will never therefore dispute that Mr. Lennox was really attached to you ; but that, swayed by a weak fear of poverty, and possibly by the remonstrances of his father or his friends, he has sacrificed his love on the altar of Mammon. Will that satisfy you ?”

“ Oh, yes ! dear papa, a thousand thanks. You have no idea of the difference it makes in my feelings. The thought that I had never been truly loved was too dreadful for me to bear—but now you will see how cheerful I will be !”



Of all the parties to constancy had cause one, perhaps, with herself, had suffered Vernon. When her turned from the proposal had been eagerly in search of dressing for dinner. stance as her mother excited considerable mind, and she anxious of the cause of

The mother and each other, and then

“ Well, Susan ! I interrupting you at have a piece of news sure will interest you

“Some one that interests me?” said Susan. “I have not so many people in whom I take an interest, that the choice will be very difficult. It must be either Louisa Castleton, Mr. Lennox, or you, Isabella.”

“Right as to two of the parties,” exclaimed her mother.

“Two out of the three!” exclaimed Susan; “then it must be Mr. Lennox and Louisa. Oh! I am so very glad, for I had heard, you know, that there had been a little coolness between them—some trifling misunderstanding, I suppose, which is now cleared up, and which only served to show them both how much they really loved one another. I am so very, very glad. I must write to Louisa directly—but are you quite sure it is true?”

“Quite sure *what* is true? How you do jump at conclusions. I never said Mr. Lennox was going to be married to Miss Castleton; and, in fact, nothing but her own absurd vanity could ever have supposed that such a thing was likely. I said two out of the three people you mentioned were going to be married. I did not even

say they were to be married to each other. However, so far you were right—only you matched Mr. Lennox to the wrong lady. He has made a better choice, and I hope that your opinion of his taste will be improved, when I assure you that he will very shortly become your brother-in-law, having this day proposed in due form for the hand of Isabella."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at Susan's feet she could not have been more astounded.

"Proposed for Isabella?" she faintly murmured.

"Yes, child! why you do not seem sufficiently rejoiced at your sister's happy prospects?"

"Perhaps she wanted him for herself," added Isabella, with a scornful laugh.

"Indeed, dear Susan, if you had but let me know, I would have taken care not to have stood in your path; but I thought all your affections were bestowed on that demure Mr. Wentworth."

At any other time this allusion to the treasured secret of her heart, which she deemed unknown to any mortal being, would have overwhelmed her with shame.

and confusion, but now it fell unheeded on her ear, and the shot, which, after all, was only a random one, glanced harmlessly aside.

“ And you really have accepted him ? ” said she ; “ accepted a man who, till the last few days, has been paying the most marked and decided attentions to another ? ”

“ Accepted him ! of course I have. I should have been a great fool to refuse a man I liked, merely because he did not quite know his own mind at first, and has taken some little time to make his choice. Suppose he has paid attention to your dear friend, whom you so romantically designate as ‘ another,’ it only proves that she was tried and found wanting—that she did not improve on acquaintance, and that though her baby face had power to attract him for a short time, she had no sterling qualities by which to retain him. No, no ! it is not I that need blush for having caught him ; it is she, who should be ashamed of herself for having let him go. But, however, even on that score I can set your mind at rest ; he only ran after her because he thought she would be

## THE WINDMILL CASTLETON.

lenses of Stapleford Castle. Now he has found out that she has no chance of that, and so he has followed the bent of his own inclinations, and thrown himself at my feet. And we are going to be married as soon as possible, and shall be as happy as the day is long, especially when we have dear Susan to witness our happiness.

Do not hope for much of happiness, ~~indeed~~. It is not thus that happy unions are constructed, and this is not the spirit in which a well-ordered mind would look upon such an important event. May God grant that you may never look back with regret at mind to this day's work!"

"~~Prayer~~ How you do preach, Susan. You would think I had announced a death or ~~you~~ instead of a wedding. Well, I can't believe that any one ever received the announcement of her sister's approaching marriage with such glum looks and sour words as you have done. But there is the dinner-bell. Don't let us dress, ~~now~~, or the dinner will be quite cold."

And with this characteristic observation—~~as to~~ her other distinguished qualities

Isabella united that of being a professed *gourmand*—she quitted the room, followed by her mother, and for a few minutes Susan was left to her own reflections.

The blow, however, was so stunning, so unexpected, that she could scarcely collect her thoughts sufficiently to comprehend the full force of it. Had her own affections been fixed upon Lennox, she could hardly have been more pained by the intelligence she had just heard. Had Lennox proved inconstant to Louisa, and engaged himself to a stranger, she would have been deeply grieved, for her own sufferings had taught her to appreciate those which would have been undergone by her friend, and her love for her would have made her feel them as her own ; but that the object to whom his love was transferred, instead of being a stranger, should be her sister—that she was about to become the sister of the man who had so deeply injured her whom she loved with more than a sister's affection—was a grievous aggravation of her sufferings. Would she not thus be for ever cut off from the sweet companionship that she had so much

valued? Could Louisa ever bear to associate on intimate terms with so near a relative of one whose name she must wish never again to hear mentioned? Would not the sight of her, or the sound of her name, bring to her mind recollections of the most painful kind? Yes, it must be so. And in gaining a brother whom she had so much reason to hate, she must be content to sacrifice that sisterly intercourse which had been the balm, the solace, the only earthly consolation of her ill-starred existence.

But here a fresh idea occurred to her mind. This future brother, at whose conduct she was so indignant, and whom she considered she had so much reason to hate, was no other than the man who had, at no distant period, saved her life at the imminent hazard of his own. She was bound to him by the strongest ties of gratitude; he had rendered her the greatest service that one individual can render to another. And this man, whom she was already bound to regard with feelings of the most affectionate gratitude on her own account, was about



to be endued with the still further claim upon her affection of becoming the husband of her only sister. And just at the moment when everything conspired to point out that her duty was clearly to love him as a brother, her heart shrunk from him as the destroyer of the happiness of one who was more to her than a sister.

“ Would that he had left me to perish !” she murmured to herself. “ Would that he had never stretched out his hand to save me and prolong my wretched existence, whose only gleam of sunshine that same hand has now so cruelly excluded. Oh, Lennox ! cruel to all, cruel even when you seem to save, it would have been far kinder had you never raised me above those dark, cold waters, which had already closed over my head.”

And then her thoughts reverted to that well-remembered time at Stapleford, when she had felt assured of the happiness of her beloved friend, and had almost believed that a prosperous fortune was yet in store even for herself.

Every hope now seemed to have been destroyed—every holding-place to which

she had clung seemed to have given way. She felt as one who, climbing up a rugged hill, has well nigh reached the summit, when some treacherous stone gives way beneath his foot. As he slides down he grasps in desperation at every object that presents itself—one after another they break away or elude his touch ; at each successive moment his descent becomes more rapid, and at length, bruised and shaken, he arrives at the bottom, and gazes with despair upon that height he at one time almost believed that he had attained. So it was with Susan ! At one period she dared to hope that the idolized Wentworth in some measure returned her devoted attachment. Grievous as was the blow when she discovered her error, she still clung to the hope that when Louisa was married to Lennox her wish might still be gratified. When Wentworth's acceptance of a distant living seemed to extinguish this hope also, she bravely determined to discard all selfish ends, and make her happiness consist in witnessing that of her beloved friend ; and so well had she succeeded in this attempt, that she had tasted that ex-

quisite pleasure which those only know who have gained a victory over self. But now this last source of holy happiness was withdrawn. Her friend's peace, more dear to her than her own, was for ever destroyed, and she was called upon to welcome the destroyer to her heart as her brother. Surely ! surely ! this trial was too hard for her to bear !

Severe as this trial was, there was another, which, though apparently of minor importance, would make itself felt hardly less severely. She knew well that her mother and sister would not spare her, but would be perpetually discussing the subject in her presence in the manner that would prove most annoying to her. She could not decide upon the demeanour that she herself ought to adopt upon the occasion. She could not bring herself to feign a joy that she did not feel, and attempt to appear gratified at what her sister was pleased to term her happy prospects. The effort of dissimulation would be too great to be sustained for so long a time, and, moreover, it would infallibly be detected ; and nothing is so trying as an

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be but throwing down the gauntlet for a contest that she was ill able to support ; so she checked the words, as they rose to her lips, and merely said—" To the health of the happy pair ; may a blessing attend their union."

It was so impossible to find fault with this, that Mrs. Vernon was silent, and Isabella replied shortly—

" Thanks for your good wishes ; I hope they are sincere."

They were not, however, to be long diverted from their favourite sport of teasing their unhappy victim ; and, accordingly, after a brief pause, Mrs. Vernon observed—

" I am afraid you will lose your friend, Susan. Miss Castleton, I suppose, will leave town, now that she has no longer any hopes of catching Mr. Lennox ?"

" Is she aware of this event ?" asked Susan, putting a strong constraint upon herself.

" Oh, yes ! that she is," answered Isabella ; " for it so happened—I suppose she was looking for Mr. Lennox, but, however, that might have been—it so happened

that just as he was saying pretty things to me, and expressing his joy that I had not been cruel, and so on, Miss Castleton stepped round the corner, and must have heard what he was saying. In fact, I am sure she did, for I saw her face, and I never saw any one look so amazed and horrified in my life. Ha! ha! ha! it makes me quite laugh to think of it. She looked so thoroughly 'sold.' "

"I wonder you can find it in your heart to laugh," retorted Susan, no longer able to control her indignation; "is it not enough to have succeeded in your object, regardless of the pain you may have caused in doing so, without exulting in the suffering you have occasioned."

"So Miss Castleton really was very much attached to my Charles, was she?" said Isabella, mockingly. "Ah, Susan, you were her confidante, and now you have let the cat out of the bag—I always thought she had a liking for him; but I really did not know she was so wonderfully smitten. Upon my word, Miss Susan, you are a most discreet confidante."

Poor Susan! she felt that, in her anger,

she had indeed betrayed herself, and that Louisa would not thank her for holding her up as an object of pity to any one, least of all to her successful and insulting rival. She replied, however—

“ I fear it is no secret that Louisa Castleton nourished an unhappy preference for the man whom you are now entitled to call your Charles ; but, after all, it is not wonderful, and I do not think that poor Louisa need be ashamed of having surrendered her heart to the machinations of so practised and successful a plotter as Mr. Lennox—and, indeed, a young and inexperienced girl from the country could hardly be expected to resist an attack from one to whom even you, Isabella, who have boasted of your obduracy to so many suits, have at length surrendered. I firmly hope and trust, however, that now that she finds how cruelly she has been deceived, she will not be long in throwing off any lingering regard for one, who will so shortly become the husband of another. And this puts me in mind,” she added, willing to change the subject, “ that you



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probably be changed. Her mother, most unintellectual people, could not be left alone ; and little as she valued Susan's society, she would prefer that to solitude—so that the poor girl saw that even this trifling indulgence would be denied her, and that her life would probably be spent in listening to the acrimonious remarks or ill-founded gossip in which it was her mother's wont to indulge, and to which moral duty would compel her to listen with patience, if not with acquiescence.

## CHAPTER XIV.

IN a very few days after Mr. Castleton's arrival in town, the period arrived originally fixed upon for Louisa's departure. Lady Barbara had been unwilling that her niece should leave her before this time, lest the world should say that she had been unable to remain in town after Mr. Lennox's engagement to Miss Vernon had been announced. Louisa yielded to the wishes of her aunt, more from a desire to do all in her power to gratify one who had been so kind to her, than from any feeling herself upon the subject; she was quitting town never again to return to it, and it mattered little to her whether the world thought her disappointed or indifferent. But, at any rate, there was no inducement to prolong her stay beyond the time appointed, and accordingly she set forth on

her return to Shelbridge, exactly three months after she had quitted it.

Most ardently had she longed for this day to arrive—to be once more alone with her beloved father, and to be freed from the annoyance of being constantly obliged to keep up appearances. Once returned to Shelbridge, busied in her old pursuits, basking in the sunshine of her father's love and the gratitude of her poorer neighbours, she flattered herself that she might yet, perhaps, meet with, not enjoyment, scarcely happiness—but rest and repose for her wounded spirit, and that satisfaction which a life of duties well performed will always give.

She still clung with a strange tenacity to the idea that Lennox had once really loved her. She would say that nothing but that consciousness could support her under her trials ; and her father, seeing how important it was, even to her bodily health, that her trials should be lightened as much as possible, did not attempt to discourage the idea, which, after all, he thought might very possibly be founded on fact. He, too, knew so well the inex-

pressible pleasure to be derived from feeling oneself the object of a devoted attachment, that he could, to a certain extent, enter into her feelings ; though he thought at the same time that when the unworthiness of the object of our love had been detected, the pleasure of having been beloved in return ought to be very considerably diminished ; and he ventured one day even to say to her, that in his opinion she ought to be more gratified by the knowledge that she had been the object of Wentworth's attachment, even though she had not been able to return it, than that she had been loved by one whose love could so easily be lost as Lennox's. She, however replied, that she had no doubt that she ought to feel what her father had described, but that, nevertheless, though she was extremely proud of having been deemed worthy of Mr. Wentworth's affection, she could not bring herself to value it, even if it existed still, in comparison with the bare remembrance of having been beloved by him whom she had herself idolized with such an overweening affection.

In reply to her father's question, whether she should have any objection to again seeing Wentworth? she said, that if he had so far overcome his unfortunate love for her as to be able to meet her without pain to himself, the meeting could be nothing but a gratification to her; that she had always regarded him with the greatest esteem and even affection; and that, if she were to hear no more of love, his society would always be agreeable to her.

It was on a beautiful summer's evening that the father and daughter were approaching their well-loved home; and Louisa, as she passed rapidly along amidst the well-known scenery, thought that she had never seen it look so beautiful. The hills, the valleys, the trees, the river, the sky, the very grass itself, seemed to have put on their gayest colours to welcome her back. For a time the pleasure that the sight of beautiful scenery always causes to those who are capable of appreciating it, especially after a long absence, occupied her heart, and she almost forgot her sorrows in the enjoyment of the beauties of nature. At last, however, as they neared Shelbridge, the road passed

by the skirts of a wood, through which ran many a well-known romantic path. At the extremity of one of these paths, leaning over the stile which separated it from the road, were two figures—that of a young man and young woman. As the carriage passed, the latter blushed and dropped a low courtesy, while the youth respectfully raised his hat. She knew them well ; they were parishioners of her father's, and had for some time been engaged to be married. The young man had now obtained a situation which would give him the means of maintaining a family, and they were to be married directly : the banns had already been once published, and the loving couple were now enjoying a stroll together in the woods after their day's work was over.

As she gazed on their happy faces, and thought of the reward which their constancy had met with, she could not avoid drawing a painful contrast between their lot and her own, and the tears rushed unbidden to her eyes. The whole current of her thoughts was now changed. She began to wonder whether Wentworth would be at the Rectory to receive them, as he had been

on the occasion of her last return home. She thought of the contrast between the present state of her feelings and that which she had at that time experienced.

“ Ah ! but he did love me then ! ” she said to herself ; and with this, her old source of consolation, she buoyed herself up over the sea of her troubles.

When they arrived, however, they did not find Wentworth awaiting them. He had thought it possible that Miss Castleton might be overcome with emotion on her first return home, and would prefer being without any witness save her father. He therefore determined to defer seeing her till the morning, and contented himself with sending up late in the evening to enquire if they were arrived safe ; and though, on receiving an answer in the affirmative his heart burned with the desire of beholding her whom he still loved so dearly, he controlled his eagerness, and patiently awaited his time.

When at length he did see her, he was struck, as Mr. Castleton had been, with the marked alteration in her appearance. In his eyes, however, it served but to make

her appear ten times more lovely than ever. As he said to Mr. Castleton a day or two afterwards—

“ When last I saw Miss Castleton, I did not think that anything could be more lovely, but now that she is returned, I find that she is improved even where there seemed to be no room for improvement.”

Mr. Castleton sighed and replied—

“ For my own part, Wentworth, I would willingly sacrifice some of this beauty you admire so much, could I but see once more the ruddy glow of health upon that delicate cheek—could I feel that there was no cause for alarm in that almost unearthly loveliness.”

“ Indeed, I trust there is no cause for alarm,” said Wentworth. “ The fresh air of her native hills will soon restore her to her wonted health ; and time must eventually heal the wound from which she is now suffering so severely .”

“ I trust it may be so,” replied the father ; “ but I confess to a feeling of great anxiety on the subject.”

By degrees, however, his anxiety wore off. Louisa's health certainly appeared to



become more re-established, and the exertions she made to keep up her spirits, and to reward the tender care of her father, were not unavailing.

Her regrets became less bitter, her interest in objects around her more sincere. Her father anxiously watched for an account of Lennox's marriage, as he thought that when that was over, she would be more able to dismiss the subject from her mind.

That account at last arrived. One day, about a month after Louisa's return to Shelbridge, when Mr. Castleton opened the newspaper, the following paragraph met his eye under the head of marriage in high life :—

“ On Thursday last, at St. George's, Hanover Square, a marriage was solemnized between the Hon. Charles Lennox, eldest son of Major-General Lord Lennox, K.C.B., K.C.H., and Miss Isabella Vernon, the lovely and accomplished daughter of the late Robert Vernon, Esq. After the ceremony a splendid *déjeuner* was prepared for the wedding party by Messrs. Gunter, at the spacious mansion of Mrs. Vernon, in Hill Street. After which the happy pair

quitted town for a short tour on the continent."

After reading this, Mr. Castleton meditated for some time how he should break the news to his daughter. At length he settled that the simplest way was the best, and accordingly, when Louisa came down stairs, he drew her towards him, seated her on his knee, and imprinting an affectionate kiss upon her forehead, he placed the paper in her hands, saying—

"Read this, darling! It is best that you should be acquainted with it at once—for you may guess what it is."

She took the paper from him, and read the paragraph to the end, as far as the blinding tears that started to her eyes would allow; when she had finished she returned the paper to her father, and pressing his hand fondly, said—

"Thank you, dear papa; you see I bear it well, and do not betray your confidence in me. Well, it is over now, and he is wedded to another; but yet I may think that he surely loved me once—there is no sin in that, is there, papa?"

"No! my darling; there can be no sin

in dwelling upon the recollection that he loved you once. But I must say I think it would be wise in you to try and forget him altogether."

"Ah! no papa; I never, never could do that. If I might not think of him as once he was, my heart would break—indeed, indeed it would!"

"Well, well, dear! don't let it break now, for I give you free leave to think of him in the light that you wish; only remember that now that you can hope nothing more from him, all vain wishes are idle, if not sinful."

"Indeed, I will think of him as little as possible, and I will not indulge in any idle wishes; but I cannot do without the consolation of occasionally indulging in a sweet retrospect."

And she kept her word. She never permitted herself to murmur against the decrees of Providence, or to indulge in vain longings that things might have turned out differently. But often, in the solitude of her own chamber, would she dwell upon his words and his looks, and murmur to herself, "Yes, he loved me once. I was

now the object of his attachment." And ~~great~~ would be the satisfaction she would ~~derive~~ from thinking that she did possess ~~qualities~~ which at one time, had the power ~~of charming him~~—that she was not utterly ~~destitute~~ of all ability to please, nay, even ~~to fascinate him~~.

The state of mind, however, though it ~~did not~~ interfere with her restoration to ~~health~~ and cheerfulness, which was gradually ~~taking place~~, was far from favourable ~~to her hopes~~ that Wentworth might still ~~be able to entertain~~. Had her heart been ~~thus~~ with scorn and indignation against ~~Lennox~~—had she shunned to think of him, and endeavoured to banish every recollection of him from the tablets of her memory, it might indeed have been possible that ~~some~~ might have been found for a new affection to spring up, and Wentworth's constant, yet unobtrusive attention might have met with its reward. But now the ground was still occupied, the memory of Lennox and of what he had ~~done~~ to her was still so carefully treasured in her heart, that it never even entered her head that it was possible that any other

image could ever be enshrined there. And Wentworth saw this, and determined not to press his suit for the present, and not yet to run the risk of another refusal.

It was necessary for him shortly to go to town, on business connected with his institution to his new living. It was arranged, therefore, between him and Mr. Castleton, that he should leave them for the present, and return in the course of the following year to pay them a long visit. By that time a change might have been effected in Louisa's mind, and if it turned out that she had become weaned from the memory of Lennox, Wentworth would try his last chance, and, if unsuccessful, would then say farewell for ever.

In the meantime it had occurred to Louisa that there was no real reason why she should be for ever separated from her friend Susan, by the event which had so recently occurred. She had never heard from her since that memorable day when Lennox finally committed himself; and, until the marriage had actually taken place, she did not like to write to her herself. Now, however, that that all was over, and

the new-married couple were gone abroad, she determined to break the ice, and, having obtained her father's permission, she wrote to her, expressing an earnest wish that their correspondence should be resumed, and begging Susan to take the first opportunity of paying another visit to Shelbridge.

Susan's delight at receiving this communication may be easily imagined, more especially as her mother held out hopes of permitting her to accept the invitation at no very distant period, when some company would be staying at Moor Park. She lost no time in replying to Louisa's letter, and giving her this information, which was almost as acceptable to Louisa as it had been to herself.

## **PART VI.**

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## **CONCLUSION.**

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### **CHAPTER I.**

**CLOSE** by one of the most crowded thoroughfares in London, where stores of wealth are exposed in the shop windows, and a continuous stream is constantly passing of those who are able and often willing to purchase them, lies a street where vice and poverty abound, and where active cunning lies constantly in waiting, ever ready to overreach the needy customer, whether he be anxious to buy or, more wretched still, is only desirous of parting with some of his already slender stock of worldly goods. No one passing from the Strand into Holywell Street, in

the busy time of the day, can avoid being struck with the complete change of scene to which a few paces introduce him. Here he is jostling his way amidst the busy crowd—the opulent merchant, the plodding banker, the astute lawyer, the well-to-do man of business successively meet his eye ; or if he fall in with some of the lower classes of society, they are generally actively employed on some business which will bring its remuneration and provide comfort for themselves and their families. The ceaseless roar of the carts and carriages, cabs and omnibuses, excites a momentary wonder in his heart as to whence they can all proceed, and whither they can be tending—coupled, perhaps, with a reflection on the enormous amount of capital invested merely in means of locomotion. Everything, in fact, bespeaks the busy, industrious, wealthy city. A few steps in advance, and all this bustle and turmoil is left behind.

Instead of shops replete with all that ingenuity can devise, or wealth can purchase, he sees only wretched tenements, stalls rather than shops, where nothing is



to be met with but old second-hand articles, in every stage of dilapidation and decay. Around him hover a crowd of ill-looking personages with Israelitish faces, who, if he seem to belong to the upper classes, obsequiously enquire if he has any cast-off garments to dispose of, and offer to wait upon him anywhere, at any time, and give the best possible price for them. Shaking himself free from these harpies, he next encounters a small knot of idle, dissolute characters, gazing in at a shop window where immoral and obscene publications are exposed to view, at the tempting price of one penny, or even one halfpenny each. An old book-stall next attracts his notice ; and here, perhaps, he might be tempted to linger, but for the alarming proximity of another of the old clothes' shops ; and a consciousness, perhaps, that he has something to lose in his pocket induces him to hurry his steps, and he experiences a feeling of relief in once more breathing a purer atmosphere in the comparatively spacious thoroughfare of the Strand.

It was through this dingy street, abound-

ing in abodes of wretchedness and vice, that Westworth a few days after the events of the last chapter, might have been seen wending his way. He was not fond of taking that course, it is true, but he was in a hurry to get to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and he knew that his shortest way from the Strand was along that street, or rather passage.

"More haste, worse speed" is, however, a true as well as ancient proverb, and Westworth soon found reason to wish that he had been content to take a somewhat circuitous route, and pursue his course along the other side of the Strand. A costermonger's cart blocked up the narrow road, and around it had collected a small crowd of idlers, eagerly engaged in some dispute, in which the costermonger himself was taking an active share. Reluctant to elbow his way through a crowd of that description, Westworth paused for a moment, hoping that it would disperse; and as he did so, his eye fell upon a young woman with an infant in her arms, who was engaged in a colloquy with one of the worthy proprietors of the old clothes'

shops, which have been above alluded to. It was evident, from the depreciating tone in which the man was speaking, that the poor creature was a seller, not a purchaser, and that the Jew was beating down the price of the article offered for sale, which, as far as Wentworth could see, appeared to be a part of the unfortunate's under-clothing. The haggling did not last long ; it was evident that the man had this great advantage, besides his experience in such matters, that while it was a matter of comparative indifference to him whether or not he became the purchaser, to the woman it was a matter of vital necessity that she should obtain the wherewithal to purchase her crust of bread.

The bargain, therefore, was soon struck, and the man, carelessly tossing the article he had just purchased into the interior of his shop, handed over a few small coins to its late owner, who, transferring them to her pocket, left the shop, and proceeded down the street, her back being still turned towards Wentworth, on whom, however, her figure and general appearance had produced a strong impression that he had

somehow seen her before. As he was still observing her with some interest, and pondering on the fancied resemblance, he saw a little urchin, who had apparently been watching the whole transaction, dart from a dark corner, and making a successful pull at her pocket, carry it off with all its contents, and disappear ere the startled Wentworth could take any step to prevent this heartless robbery. Quick as the movement was, however, and adroitly as the theft had been perpetrated, it was not accomplished without some slight jerk, which caused the woman to put her hand to her dress, to feel if all was right. In an instant she discovered her loss, and turning round, suddenly uttered a cry of despair, which might have melted the hardest heart, revealing to Wentworth, as she did so, the well-remembered features of Mary Brown. Altered indeed they were, since last he had seen them ; care, sorrow, illness, privation, and misery had done their work—the bright eye was dimmed, and the full, round cheek was sunken ; but still they were hers—there could be no mistake as to her identity.

She, however, was so absorbed in her own distress, that she did not notice Wentworth, though he now advanced rapidly towards her.

“ Oh !” she shrieked, “ it is gone—it was my all—the only barrier betwixt me and starvation ; for heaven’s sake, good, kind people,” as the crowd now flocked around her, “ give it back to me, and may you never know what it is to feel the misery that I feel.”

The unfeeling mob, however, as was to be expected, only jeered and laughed at her distress, and Wentworth, when he put his hand in his pocket to find something to give the poor girl, to provide for her immediate necessities, found that his pocket too had been cleverly picked, and that he had not the means of fulfilling his intention. He regarded not, however, the loss of a few shillings, or even sovereigns, in comparison with the satisfaction he experienced in having thus encountered the lost sheep of his flock ; under circumstances, too, which gave him great hopes of being able to win her back to the fold.

Forcing his way through the crowd,

until he reached the astonished girl, he said in an authoritative voice,—

“ Follow me, Mary, and I will take care that you shall not starve for the present, at any rate.”

The poor girl seemed perfectly bewildered. At any other time, she would have shrunk from meeting one who had known her in her days of happiness and innocence ; but now, so suddenly had he appeared before her, in the hour of her greatest distress, that she considered him almost as an angel sent from heaven for her deliverance. She obeyed his directions therefore, and followed him passively and submissively, as he made his way with difficulty, being accompanied by the throng, who were anxious to witness the *dénouement* of an adventure which had taken so unexpected a turn. In this, however, they were disappointed. As soon as they arrived at the end of the street, Wentworth called a cab, and placing his newly-found *protégée* inside, jumped in after her, and desired the cabman to drive to his lawyer's in Lincoln's Inn Fields,—where, besides transacting the business on which he was

originally intent, he could obtain some cash to serve his present purpose, and satisfy the necessities of his unfortunate companion.

As they proceeded, he questioned her kindly on her past history and present condition; of which she gave him a true and faithful account, concealing, however, the name of the man who had so cruelly wronged her. When she arrived at the point where Lennox announced his intention of discarding her, she became painfully affected, and was hardly able to proceed. After a short pause, however, she went on,—

“ Well, sir, after that dreadful day, I would not willingly have stayed in the same house another hour—but I thought of my poor child, and remembered that, for his sake, I ought to husband all my resources; so I stayed there for the week, going out every day and trying to get work, but no one would give it me. I had no one to speak to my character, and they would not trust me to take the work home with me, and I could not go and work at their work-rooms, if I could have

obtained employment there, because of the child ; so when the time came for leaving my lodging I took another, as cheap as I could find one, and went on trying to get work, but with no better success than before. Then, sir, what with the fatigue and anxiety, and bad sleeping-room, I fell ill, and could do nothing, and I thought the poor baby would have died too, and in my misery I almost wished it might, for I did not see how I was to keep it, and I thought it would be a happiness for it to be removed from this evil world. However, sir, the Almighty ordered it otherwise, and we both got better, but that illness made a woful hole in the little money that I still possessed. So, sir, I starved myself, and sold nearly every thing I had, to get enough to keep body and soul together ; and the very last article I had, which common decency would allow me to part with, was that which I just now disposed of ; and I thought that when the money I received for that was gone, I must just lie down and die—but I did not think the time would come so soon ; and when I lost my little all in that



cruel way, I felt, indeed, that all hope was at an end for me in this world, and it was terrible to think of what might be in store for me in the next."

"And were you not strongly tempted," said Wentworth, "in this your extremity to resort to criminal means of obtaining your livelihood?"

As he said this, he fixed his eyes searchingly upon her, to note the effect of his question, and determine as far as possible the truthfulness of her reply.

"No, sir, I cannot say I was tempted. I will not deny that the notion occurred to me, as it will to every starving girl in my situation—but it was too horrible to be entertained for a moment. No, sir, I have been very wicked, I know; I do not attempt to palliate my offence; but it was misguided affection, not the desire of gain, that led me astray, and no extremity could ever tempt me to become so bad as that, sir, indeed you may believe me."

"I do believe you, my good girl," replied Wentworth, "and I need not say how rejoiced I am that I can say so with sincerity, and most thankful am I to the

Almighty for having permitted me to be the instrument of preserving you from further temptation. But now as to your future prospects ; will you consent to return at once and live with your poor old grandmother, who has been almost heart-broken at your loss ?”

“ Oh ! sir, she never would receive me again, and besides, I should never dare to show my face again in my native village.”

“ Your first difficulty, I think, may be easily removed. I will not attempt to conceal that your grandmother has been extremely angry with you—but I have no doubt that the knowledge of your repentance, and the hope of seeing you again, aided by the exhortations of Mr. Castleton, will soon induce her to receive you with joy and gladness.”

“ Well, sir, but then I really could not face my old companions and acquaintance—think how they would jeer at me and despise me—me, who used to hold my head so high amongst them all.”

“ I trust,” replied Wentworth, “ that the majority of them will be too much imbued with the spirit of Christianity to

exult over a repentant sinner. Doubtless, there will be some of less disciplined minds, and you may have to endure many sneers and taunts, that will no doubt be hard to put up with ; but you must consider this as part of your punishment. Think how greatly you have sinned ; and whenever you feel that your trials are severe, be thankful that in patient endurance of them you have a means of testifying the sincerity of your repentance ; for I trust that your repentance is sincere, and that it is not only the pressure of immediate want which has caused you to repent the past."

"No, sir, indeed I do feel the most lively sorrow for all that is past ; and I feel sure that were I in the same circumstances as I was before, I should act very differently."

"Do not be sure," replied Wentworth ; "it is not for any of us, much less for one who has so recently erred so fearfully as you have, to feel confident that we shall resist temptation. Fear and self-distrust, coupled with a humble reliance on God's grace, which alone can preserve us, are

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By this time, they were arrived at the lawyer's, from whom Wentworth obtained money sufficient for the poor girl's present necessities; and having requested her to call at that gentleman's in two or three days, to enquire for any letter that might be written to her containing directions for her future proceedings, he permitted her to depart, while he himself went about the business which had brought him to town. He did not omit, however, to write a long letter to Mr. Castleton, detailing all the occurrences of the day, and begging him, if he thought it the best course to pursue, to see the widow on the subject, and work upon her feelings sufficiently to induce her to give her erring granddaughter a kind reception.

## CHAPTER II.

It may easily be conceived that Mr. Castleton perused Wentworth's letter with the liveliest satisfaction. To any right thinking person, the intelligence that a sinner has seen the error of his ways, and been rescued from the paths of vice, will be productive of pleasure ; but in this instance, not only had the sheep that had strayed been from his own flock, but she had been one, in whom he had always taken a great interest, both from her many good qualities, and her remarkable personal beauty ; for it is strange what an influence beauty has over the best and most regulated minds. However much we may determine to be impartial, and however strictly we may regulate our *actions* in accordance with that determination, in our inmost *thoughts* we can never free our-

selves entirely from the dominion of beauty. And it is not therefore surprising that the fair and delicate beauty of poor Mary, which he had foreseen would be but too probably a snare to her, had excited a more than common interest in Mr. Castleton's mind.

His gratification, therefore, was great in receiving Wentworth's letter, and he lost no time in acting upon the suggestion it contained, and proceeding to the widow's cottage. He thought it as well to introduce the subject boldly, in the hope that her first joy at hearing of her granddaughter's recovery would induce her to open her arms at once, and beg that she might be restored to her immediately. He accordingly began without preface.

"I have come to see you this morning, my good woman, to tell you such excellent news that I have just heard—your grand-daughter, Mary, has seen the folly and wickedness of her conduct, and, though she has been in great distress and affliction, I hope it will have been the means of working her ultimate good."

If he expected that the suddenness

of the intelligence would melt the old woman's heart, he was disappointed ; she merely replied, coldly—

“ Indeed, sir, I am very glad to hear it, and I hope her repentance is sincere, and that I shall not hear of her again getting into trouble.”

“ But should you not like to see her once more ?”

“ No, sir, no ; I will never look upon her again—she has chosen her own part—she left her poor old grandmother, and I certainly shall not go to fetch her back again.”

“ But she is in great poverty and distress, and exposed to dreadful temptations in London ; will you not ask her here, where she may be preserved from them ?”

“ This place did not preserve her before, sir, and I don't see why it should again.”

“ But she is very anxious to see you, to receive your forgiveness, and to endeavour, by her attention to you for the remainder of your life, to atone, as far as she can, for her past neglect.”

“ I don't want her attention, sir ; she



can never give back to me the peace of mind of which she has robbed me."

"But you told me you had forgiven her the injury which, I do not deny, she has inflicted upon you."

"Yes, sir, I have forgiven her—I bear her no malice, I don't wish any harm to happen to her; but I can't forget what she has done, and I don't want to see her again."

"And do you call this forgiveness?" urged Mr. Castleton; "do you call it forgiveness, merely not to wish that harm may befall her? Answer me this, woman, is this the forgiveness you yourself hope for? Have you reflected, that we all of us stand far more in need of pardon from God than this poor girl does of forgiveness from you? that the offences we have committed against Him are of far deeper dye than the want of duty she has been guilty of towards you? Do you not wish that her sins against God may be pardoned? and if you hope that he will blot out her heinous crime against Himself, ought not you to be ready to overlook the pain that she has caused you? Instead of this sullen indif-

ference, you ought to feel transported with joy that she who was dead is alive again, that she who was lost is now found. Remember, that we are told "that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth;" and, while angels are joining in hymns of thankfulness, will you sullenly content yourself with saying that you do not wish any harm to happen to her? Oh, reflect upon the unchristian spirit you are indulging, and when next I see you let me find that you are prepared to welcome back the poor castaway, and to do your utmost to lighten those trials which she will most assuredly be called upon to bear. For the present, farewell—I will see you again in the evening."

He then quitted the cottage, and with a heavy heart returned to his house. He was deeply grieved to find so uncharitable, so unchristian a spirit in one whom he was wont to reckon among the flower of his flock, and he almost feared lest even his last words should fail of producing the effect that he desired. He communicated his doubts and fears to Louisa, who, although

she could not assist him in the matter, as her delicacy shrunk from interfering with it, felt deeply interested in the result, and awaited the issue of the evening interview with the greatest anxiety.

It was more satisfactory than they had dared to hope. The good widow, though somewhat obstinate and narrow-minded, was pious and well-intentioned, and moreover accustomed to look with respect and veneration upon her spiritual pastor, whose last words had sunk into her heart, and produced an impression which time only served to strengthen. Mr. Castleton therefore immediately wrote to desire the unfortunate girl to come down at once to Shelbridge, and enclosed a sum of money sufficient to pay the expenses of her journey, and liquidate any debts that she might have contracted in London.

He occupied the time which would intervene previous to her arrival, in impressing upon her grandmother the necessity of receiving her, not only with kindness, but cordiality, and succeeded so well that, when the poor girl did at last arrive, she was both surprised and touched at the tone of

her reception. Mr. Castleton had already, with careful forethought, secured some work for her, that she might not feel that she was a burden to her grandmother, or a mere recipient of charity : so that, as she herself expressed it to Louisa, a short time afterwards, "she felt as if it was almost wrong that her punishment should not be more severe ; and yet ma'am," she continued, "it has not been light. No one can tell the agonies of mind that I endured for six weeks and more before Mr. Wentworth encountered me ; for, in addition to all my remorse for my crime, all my horror at the future that seemed to await me, I had the stinging consciousness of being deceived, where I had put my whole trust ; of being treated with neglect and cruelty by the being whom I idolized, and for whom I had sacrificed everything. Oh ! ma'am, you can never know the bitterness of such feelings as those."

Louisa sighed, and the tears rose to her eyes, as she thought that she too had tasted the same bitter cup—that she too had been basely deceived and cruelly neglected, and a secret sympathy sprung up in her heart

for the young creature, whose case in one respect presented some similarity to her own. She little knew how far deeper her interest would have been, had she known that it was by the same hand they both were stricken. But Mary never breathed the name of her deceiver, though in all else she made a full confession both to Mr. Castleton and Louisa of all that had befallen her. The greatest pleasure she could enjoy was a conversation with Louisa, to whom she felt less afraid of unburthening her heart and pouring out her sorrows than to her father. And it was strange to see those two young girls, the one stained with crime and bowed down with shame, the other pure and immaculate as the dew from heaven, yet both afflicted—the one in her guilt, the other in her innocence—and both striving in meek and patient humility to sustain with patience the trials with which it had pleased God to afflict them ; and this intercourse was of benefit to both. To Mary, who learnt from Louisa's lips the true way of making her repentance acceptable to God, and who saw in her innocence the depth of her own guilt ; and to Louisa,

who in the other's trials saw that her own were by comparison light ; and who found cause to reflect with thankfulness that in this matter, at least, she had escaped sin, and had been spared the ever-stinging reproaches of an evil conscience.

This state of things, however, was not destined to endure for any length of time. There was a low fever prevalent in the neighbourhood, by which Mary, whose constitution had been much injured by her recent trials, was speedily attacked. Her enfeebled frame was ill able to bear up against the violence of the disease, and for some time her life was considered in danger. She had, however, passed the crisis of the attack, and was pronounced in a fair way of recovery, when the loss of her child, whose sickness had been carefully concealed from her during her own illness, but whose death could be kept secret no longer, gave such a shock to her feelings as to cause a most dangerous relapse, accompanied by a high accession of fever. It need not be said that Louisa Castleton was a constant attendant upon her. Her father had at first rather objected, on ac-

count of the danger of catching the contagion ; but he allowed himself to be overruled by his daughter's entreaties, who, while she felt the deepest interest in the sufferer, was also conscious of the comfort that her presence afforded her. One day that the poor girl was rather stronger than usual, she was bewailing her hard fate in being thus condemned to part from all she had to love on earth, when Mr. Castleton, who was present, interrupted her, and said gently, but firmly—

“ Remember, Mary, what you were saying the other day, that you seemed to be almost too happy—that, after all the sins of your past life, you seemed to have well-nigh escaped punishment. You did not then think how soon the punishment would come ; but, though unexpected, you must not forget that it is not the less merited. It is, indeed, a severe blow to you to lose your child ; but had you a right to expect that you were to derive happiness from that which would never have existed but for your own sin ? Do not, therefore, increase your offence by murmuring against God. You may yourself be shortly called

upon to quit this world, and then you will have the happiness of again meeting the innocent being who has just preceded you, if you prepare yourself by a proper train of thought for following him. Life must be short to all of us—to you, in particular, it may be very short. Make the most, then, of the time that is left you for preparation, and do not waste any part of it in vain regrets or sinful murmurings.”

Mr. Castleton spoke thus, not attempting to conceal the fact that her life was in danger, for he considered it a foolish, nay, a criminal weakness, to conceal from those who are in danger of death, the state in which they are placed. “The time,” he would say, “for preparation is always short enough—why shorten it still further, by postponing the awful announcement until the waning faculties no longer permit it to be employed to advantage?”

In this instance, the warning seemed to be amply called for. In a few hours after the above conversation, a raging delirium set in, which the doctor said would be a crisis; that on recovering her senses, she would either sink at once from weakness,



or become convalescent. Mr. Castleton was obliged to leave the cottage on other parochial business, and Louisa obtained permission to take his place by the bedside of the unfortunate invalid.

She sat there for some time, listening to the incoherent mutterings of delirium, and offering up sincere and fervent prayers that the life of the sufferer might be spared, or, if that could not be, that her tardy repentance might be accepted ; when suddenly a sound caught her ear, by which the train of her thoughts was suddenly interrupted, and the very circulation of her blood seemed suspended. She did not breathe, and her heart did not appear to beat, as she listened in awful suspense for a repetition of the sound that had so affected her. As she bent over the sufferer, the low murmurings, which she had for some time been pouring forth, seemed to have assumed coherency. Yes ! there could be no doubt, there again was the word that had so struck her.

“ Oh ! Lennox, Lennox,” said the half-stifled voice, “ how could you treat me so ? and why have you taken away my boy

—and he took for his  
you when first you  
me—for you did lo  
did not you? Oh  
you not to love me!

And here she be  
hemous herself, in  
at any other time, he  
ative heart with  
passion.

But now other f  
pity were agitating he  
petrified—she presen  
that she had asse  
though there was a  
fear.

Her lips slightly a  
ance expressive of  
agonizing thought a  
It was then Lennox

done all this at the very time when he had been pouring forth his protestations to herself; and when she had fondly believed that he really loved her, and her alone, he had been making the very same protestations to a peasant girl out of her own village; and the love that he had borne to each of them had probably been of about equal intensity. Each had been the sport of his idle hours; each had been thrown aside when the momentary passion was over. No, he had never really loved her, and the last hope—the last consolation—to which she had clung in the midst of her troubles, was at one fatal blow taken away from her.

All these thoughts flashed across her mind with the rapidity and vividness of lightning. At length her overcharged brain could no longer support them, and she sank insensible upon the floor. How long she lay there she never knew; but great was the consternation of the widow, when she came up-stairs to enquire if any thing was wanted, and discovered Miss Castleton extended lifeless upon the ground.

The usual restoratives were employed

for some time without effect, but at length consciousness returned, bringing with it such intense mental anguish that she wished in her heart that she had died. She made, however, a violent effort to compose herself in some degree before her father's return, which was momentarily expected. She felt herself, however, so utterly unequal to the task of walking home, that a messenger was despatched for the carriage, which arrived at about the same time with Mr. Castleton. To him she merely stated that she had been taken suddenly ill, and that she would explain farther when she got home. Mr. Castleton, therefore, only stayed to inform himself of the condition of the patient upstairs, who, he was informed, was going on favourably, having fallen into a tranquil slumber; and then, placing his daughter in the carriage, he drove her rapidly back to the Rectory, where she at once yielded to his entreaties, and laid herself down on her bed.

After a short time, feeling that her own reflections were the most painful companions she could have, she requested her

er to come up to her, and narrated  
fly all that had occurred, and the dis-  
ery that had so deeply affected her.

My poor, poor child!" said her father  
lerly, "it is indeed hard for you to bear  
. To feel that all that you have  
sted to has been a deception, that all  
t you have believed has been a lie.  
a must turn it, however, dearest, to the  
t advantage; and let this disappoint-  
nt lead you to fix your affections on  
gs not of this world. Remember, the  
rper the pain, the more complete will  
the weaning of yourself from the world.  
is a hard lesson, but we must all one  
learn it; and though you perhaps have  
fered more than most, it is, doubtless,  
your special advantage in the end."

## CHAPTER III.

LOUISA endeavoured, as far as possible, to profit by the pious admonitions of her father—she schooled herself into submission. She forced herself to recollect that everything is for the best, and will ultimately work to our benefit ; but the blow she had received had been so severe, that she could not recover from it. She had clung so desperately to the belief that she had once been really loved by Lennox ; that in his desertion of her he had been either deceived and misguided, or had yielded to the urgency of his father or his friends ; that, in fact, had he been left to himself, she would assuredly have been the chosen of his heart ;—that all her sufferings seemed redoubled now, when she found that spontaneously, at the very moment when he had declared he loved her and her alone, he had been devoting him-

self to another woman, with whom he had been living in a criminal connection.

And this last reflection brought with it the painful consideration that not only had she never been really loved by Lennox, but that he had never been worthy of her love. And this, perhaps, was the most heart-rending thought of all—for there is nothing so painful to the heart as the dethronization of its idol. We may lose all hope, but we still cling to the possibility of silently worshipping ; but when we find that the object of our adoration is no longer worthy of it, or, still worse, has never at any time been so, a void is created in the heart which causes it to ache indeed. And thus it was with Louisa. In all her misery, in all her hopelessness, she had still loved passionately, she had still clung with eagerness to the belief that her love had once been returned. Now both these sources of consolation were reft from her at once ; and she did indeed feel utterly wretched and miserable. There was now no possible satisfaction to be derived from thinking of Lennox. She must forget him ; banish him from her thoughts alto-

gether, and make that very effort, of which she had told her father she felt so wholly incapable. Bravely, however, did she set about it. Firmly did she resolve to follow what she saw was the only right course; and steadily did she act upon her resolution; but her strength sank under the trial. The spirit, indeed, was willing, but the flesh was weak; and the pallid complexion, the attenuated form, the lack-lustre eye, told but too true a tale of mental anguish and suffering.

Her father observed these symptoms with the gravest anxiety. He saw the efforts that she made to keep up her spirits: the struggles that she underwent with her mental depression. Nothing that he could do or say could avail her; for her frame of mind was all that he could wish. She concealed nothing from him; she laid bare to him the inmost recesses of her heart; and he saw how torn and lacerated it was, and how severe were her sufferings, although she manifested the most complete and pious submission to the will of her Heavenly Father, who had seen fit so to try her.



“ Indeed, my dearest father,” she said, “ I not only fully admit that I have deserved these trials, but I can quite see how necessary they were for me. I had permitted a mere mortal to assume that first place in my heart, which should have been reserved for my God alone. I raised up an idol, though not of wood or stone, and I fell down and worshipped it. He in his mercy has now removed the object of my idolatry, and my heart is once more free to expand towards Him, from whom, had I been happy in my earthly love, I might have become more and more estranged. You have often told me, that affliction is necessary to turn our hearts towards God. In my case, the affliction has been very severe—but I can well see that a severe remedy was necessary for my deeply rooted disease ; and the effect has been all that you, my dearest father, could wish. I cannot say how much better prepared I am for death than before these trials overtook me.”

“ I am indeed truly grateful to hear you speak so beautifully on the subject,” said her father ; “ and truly rejoiced to find

that you have turned your affliction to so good an account. It is always right that we should be prepared for death, which cannot be far off, and may overtake us at any moment, but I trust, my darling, that the hour appointed for your removal is as far as distance as we in this world measure time, and that you may be spared to see the solace and happiness of your father's old age."

"I hope it may be so, dearest papa; however wounded my heart may be, and, however much on my own account I should regret when the time arrived for closing my eyes in peace, I wish, earnestly wish, to live for your sake. To be your comfort in your declining years, is indeed a happiness that I may still enjoy in this world—but if it should be ordered otherwise, if I should be taken away from you, you will not be inconsolable, my own beloved father, you will remember the exhortations you have so often addressed to me, and will strive to think that all is for the best."

"I will, indeed, endeavour to act up to my principles," replied Mr. Castleton;

“ and I trust that, by God’s grace, I shall be enabled to do so. He has promised ‘ that he will temper the wind to the shorn lamb ;’ but great would be the trial, and hard, indeed, would it be to bear.”

“ But think how much lighter your burden would be than mine is,” she replied, sadly ; “ you would be able to reflect with pleasure and complacency on the years you had spent in the company of your well-loved child—would you not ? while I, I have no past, to which I can dare to look back ; ah ! that it is, which is so dreadful.”

“ Well, dear, we will not compare the severity of our trials, more especially, as I sincerely trust, that I may not be called upon to support that which you have assigned to me ; and in order that I may be spared it, you will do your best to keep up your spirits, and invigorate your health, will you not ?”

“ Indeed, I will,” she replied, and she kept her word—but it availed little—the alarming symptoms continued ; and when Susan arrived, according to promise, to visit her friend, she was horror-stricken at

~~showing~~ her altered appearance. To her ~~father~~ revealed all that she had ~~been~~ ~~feeling~~ Lennox, and it was no ~~small~~ ~~revelation~~ of the pain which this ~~revelation~~ ~~was~~ already inflicted on Susan. It ~~was~~ ~~the~~ additional proof of the ~~mis-  
take~~ ~~and~~ unworthiness of her brother.

When Susan had been at Shelbridge for some little time Mr Castleton took her ~~aside~~ ~~and~~ questioned her on the opinion that she had formed of Louisa's health, warning her that it would be a false kindness in her part to represent the case as ~~less~~ ~~serious~~ ~~than~~ she thought it ; as in the ~~event~~ ~~of~~ the worst happening, the truth ~~must~~ ~~soon~~ be revealed, and he should only be the better prepared for having had ~~previous~~ notice of it ; and begging her, therefore, to let him know her candid opinion on the subject. With many tears, therefore, Susan confessed, that she considered Louisa in a very dangerous state, but that she had not enough experience in such matters to be able to pronounce decidedly on so important a matter. Her opinion, however, coincided so much with

his own, that he determined on at once consulting a physician, although he did not anticipate that much benefit could be derived from his doing so. However, as one of the most eminent physicians of the day happened to be staying at Stapleford Castle, he was requested to come over. To him Mr. Castleton revealed so much of the state of the case as to enable him to form a correct judgment, and then, in breathless suspense, awaited his opinion. The result was, that the worthy man, with many expressions of sympathy, informed Mr. Castleton, that though he need not despair, there was undoubtedly great cause for alarm, and that one thing, at any rate, was certain, that medicine would be of no avail. He suggested the usual remedy of change of air and scene—but Mr. Castleton knew well that as no association connected with her unhappy attachment belonged to that place, no change would be beneficial; and that, if it were possible to relieve her mind by diverting her thoughts by constant occupation, her own home, and her own pursuits among the poor, would be most

I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I have managed to find some time to write to you. I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I have managed to find some time to write to you.

[illegible]

The witness that Whitworth was expected  
would not be heard by Susan at any time  
within some hours of her arrival: but on  
the afternoon her feelings were so absorbed  
with grief in the melancholy state of her

friend, that she only felt how delighted she would have been, under any other circumstances, to have received such an intimation. The idea of profiting by her death did not once cross her mind. If it had occurred to her, she would have banished it at once as totally unworthy, and moreover she would have reflected, that Wentworth's love for Louisa could only be heightened by her present circumstances, and that even if her death were to happen shortly, he would probably return at once to his living with his heart full of love for the departed, and would probably never return to a neighbourhood which would for ever after be fraught with such painful associations. She might have thought thus, had the idea occurred to her ; but, as before stated, it really did not. She was too full of grief at the too probable loss of her friend, and of sympathy for the anguish which Mr.Castleton and Wentworth would in that event be doomed to endure, for any selfish feeling of that nature to find a place. She looked forward therefore to the meeting with Wentworth with a melancholy pleasure. With pleasure, inasmuch as to

see him and to hear his voice must always be productive of pleasure to her, but with melancholy, since she could well conceive the anguish of mind into which he must have been thrown by the sad intelligence contained in Mr. Castleton's communication.

It was on a fine afternoon, early in October, that Wentworth arrived once more at Shelbridge. The trees had many of them already put on their autumn livery, and had changed their garb of green for every variety of red and yellow. The sun, which was within an hour of setting, was pouring a flood of golden light across the valley, and bringing out each varying shade into greater vividness and distinctness. There was hardly any breeze, and though the morning had been chilly, the sun had still sufficient power to warm and purify the atmosphere, so that, at this period of the afternoon, the temperature spoke more of the decline of summer than of the advent of winter. So warm was it, that Louisa, well wrapped in a cloak, was permitted to sit on her favourite seat, whence one of the



most picturesque views of the valley was commanded.

As she sat and gazed upon it, she thought that she had never seen it look more beautiful.

“How fortunate it is,” she said, “that there has been so little wind this year. The leaves are almost all left on the trees, so that we have the gorgeous spectacle of the autumnal tints, without the melancholy prospect of some leafless skeletons marring the harmony of the scene with their gaunt and naked arms.”

“The melancholy part of the prospect,” replied her father, “is the reflection that it necessarily causes in our mind, that it will all so soon disappear. The leaves all tremble to their fall, and the first gale will scatter them in the dust, and leave nought but the leafless skeletons behind.”

As he spoke thus, his voice faltered, and a deep sigh accompanied his words. He was thinking, that she, the fairest ornament of that fair scene, would soon be taken from his sight, while he, the bare and leafless skeleton, would be left in his desolation to bemoan her loss.

Louisa divined the thought, and pressing his hand tenderly, she replied—

“ But then, dear papa, we know that the spring will soon be here, and then the leaves will once more be reunited to the stems that bore them, and present a fairer spectacle than this, connected with no such melancholy associations. And in the mean time the fallen leaves will not be idle. They will cluster around the roots, and fertilize the ground about them, so that the tree itself will be strengthened, and will put forth fresh shoots towards Heaven.”

Her father could not speak, but tenderly returned the pressure of her hand, while Susan, who stood a little in the rear, did not attempt to restrain her fast falling tears. A silence ensued, which was interrupted by Louisa herself, who exclaimed—

“ Hark ! I hear wheels. It is time for Mr. Wentworth to be here, is it not ? Yes ; there is the carriage ? Had you not better go and meet him, papa, and bring him to me—for I should be sorry to go in as long as the sun is shining so gloriously,” and as her father left her, she added to Susan, “ It may be the last time

that I shall see the sun shining upon a scene like this. It is getting late in the season for such fine weather, and another summer it will not be mine to see. You cannot think how strange it is, she pursued," as her weeping companion made no reply, "to think that one is gazing upon so many things for the last time. One gale of wind and these leaves will be scattered, and when next the trees are clothed in their spring attire, I shall have been long removed from the scene of their existence. Nay, do not weep so, dear Susan, think how much more glorious will be the scene that I shall then be privileged to look upon. What can this earth in all its beauty display that can compare with the joys of Heaven? And yet it is very beautiful," she murmured, "Did you ever hear Susan, that some great and good men have thought it not improbable that, after the final destruction of this world, as at present constituted, it may be remodelled, and in a new and purified state be assigned as our dwelling-place, when we are united to our purified bodies. It is a pleasing thought, methinks, that that, which has been the scene of our

Lower down be the scene of his best work which even in its present state should be purified from all that is superfluous, and, resplendent with the presence of the eternal Son, stand in a state of transcendent glory. But here comes papa Westworth."

And, in truth, the two gentlemen were advancing towards them from the house. The interview between them was of a most agitating description, it was as nothing compared to what Westworth expected to undergo on first seeing Miss Castleton. The meeting with a person whom one has been sent for expressly to see before their death, must always be a painful and a trying scene; but in this case it was more than usually so. He still loved her with all the devotion of a faithful heart, yet must he control all excessive exhibition of feeling. He must be as the old and affectionate friend, and nothing more, of her whom he still idolized, and who was so soon to be taken from him. Her father might lean on her, imprint a fond kiss upon her forehead,

head, or hold her delicate hand within his by the hour, while even Susan had some such consolation ; but he must remain impassive, and appear composed, while his very heart was being torn asunder with anguish. There was another concealment, moreover, that he had to practise ; for while his heart was torn with grief for the victim, it burned with fierce indignation against the betrayer. And as he gazed on the fair form before him, which a few short weeks had sufficed to bring to the verge of the grave, he could scarce control his wrath against the man who had caused this cruel wreck. “ Had he never crossed her path,” he thought, “ she would have continued to lead a happy and contented existence, the joy of her bereaved father, and the support and comfort of all those around her ; and who knows but that, in time, my faithful devotion might have won upon her affections, and we then might have lived in peace and innocence, denizens of this almost earthly paradise. But the designing serpent entered our abode of happiness, and behold the result. A fair young girl consigned to an early

grave; a father, already deeply tried, deprived of his sole remaining solace; and myself, the brightest hopes of my youth blighted, condemned to pass a wretched, and, possibly, prolonged existence in unavailing regrets for the past."

But all these feelings must be suppressed. Louisa could not endure that any one should by word, by look or sign, arraign the conduct of Lennox. It was not, of course, a subject on which she could enter with Wentworth; but, to her father, she had spoken her mind freely.

"I acknowledge," she had said, "that Mr. Lennox has wronged me—that, in depriving you of me, he has deeply injured you. I am quite aware that he therefore stands in need of your forgiveness, and it is for that reason that I implore you to forgive him; forgive him from your heart; think how glorious a thing it is to forgive, and what an opportunity now presents itself of practising so noble a virtue. And it is only an injury to yourself, dearest papa, that you have to forgive. He has not injured me, who has sent me earlier than might otherwise have been the case,

to the state of happiness that I trust awaits me. It is *you* that he has injured. It is, therefore, a personal injury that you have to forgive. Forgive it, then, as you hope that all my numerous shortcomings will themselves be forgiven by Him whom the most perfect of us has offended so deeply. He may not have been so much to blame as you think. He may even now be repentant. It is my earnest and constant prayer that he may not be visited with chastisement on account of his sins against us, but that it will please the Almighty to lead him to himself, and cause him to be conscious of his sins by judgment tempered with mercy."

It was a hard struggle that Ferdinand had to endure, ere he could bring his mind to the temper that his daughter desired. Accustomed as he was to self-control, to the repression of the unruly passions that so much vex and harass our imperfect nature, this was the hardest trial he had yet been called upon to go through ; for though Louisa, with ingenious sophistry, had endeavoured to exonerate Lennox from the blame of having caused any in-

jury to her, and had striven to show her father that it was only a personal injury that he had to forgive, he could not but feel that the blow had reached him through her ; and he could not forget that, though peace and eternal repose would be the end ultimately attained, the grief and anguish of which he had been the cause to her trusting and guileless heart, could not be over-estimated. He saw, however, that his daughter was right in her injunctions, and that the course she pointed out was the one which, as a Christian man and a Christian minister, he was bound to follow. He therefore promised her that he would endeavour strenuously to do so. And he kept his word, and was almost astonished to find how complete was the success that attended upon his own honest exertions, aided by that grace from above for which he never ceased to pray. He arrived at length at the point of considering that Lennox was far more an object of pity than of anger, and he was able from his inmost heart to join in his daughter's prayers that he might one day be mercifully led to see the error of his ways, and that his repentance might not be too late.



From Wentworth, however, so much younger, and so much less trained in the bitter school of suffering, the same self-conquest could not be expected, and it was with a heart divided between grief and indignation that he now came forward to address Louisa.

In her manner, however, there was but little agitation that could be detected. Her thoughts had been so turned to the future, that the feelings that agitate us so much in this world had but little power over her. She considered her death as certain, and as near at hand; and she had so accustomed herself to the contemplation of it, that she experienced little or no agitation from anything that happened casually to remind her of it. At the moment, too, when she saw Wentworth approaching, her thoughts had been especially drawn towards it by the sight of the falling leaves, so that his arrival occasioned no sensation in her bosom, except that of gratification at once more beholding one whom she esteemed so highly. She held out her hand to him, therefore, with a smile, and said—

“I am so much obliged to you, Mr.

"*Westworth*, for coming so quickly to see me tonight—much as I expected as much, my *father* was would not disregard your suggestions."

She said this in as quiet and unobtrusive a manner as if the question had been merely one of seeing her before she left the country for a month or two; and *Westworth*, whose feelings had been wrought up to a high pitch, hardly knew what to reply, nor in what style to address her.

"*Thank you very much*," he answered, "it is indeed through you we are looking so well that I trust your father has needlessly worried both himself and me."

"*My Mr. Westworth*," replied she, with a sad smile, "as we have no complaints now in respect to now, I know that in short we have you and I wish that the two who next to my father have been my dearest friends should be well in the end, that is why I summoned you—that is why you are here."

"*My Mr. Westworth* made no reply, and the conversation then turned upon general topics until the sinking of the sun warned

them that it was time to retire to the house.

Mr. Castleton supported his daughter up-stairs to her room, and Wentworth and Susan were left together.

“This is, indeed, a sad ending to the tale of love that I once unfolded to you, Miss Vernon,” said Wentworth, in a low voice. “It is not much more than a year ago, and how little did we then expect all that has since occurred.”

“Little indeed,” replied Susan. “I sometimes blame myself, Mr. Wentworth, for having inadequately performed the office you assigned to me of watching over her. Had I warned her against this unfortunate attachment, all might have turned out so differently—but, indeed, I acted for the best. I did all I could to find out the character of her late admirer, and no one said aught but praise of him.”

“He has done nothing to deserve the world’s censure,” replied Wentworth. “Heartless and selfish as he is, the world is too full of those who are equally so, to be able to condemn him, who is but one of themselves. But indeed, Miss Vernon,

deeply as I, above all others, have to deplore the result of that unhappy affair at Stapleford, I cannot blame you ; you, of course, acted for the best—indeed you could have had no motive for doing otherwise."

A slight colour rose to Susan's pale cheek, as she thought of the motive that might have swayed her in any project to further Louisa's marriage ; but it was, at any rate, satisfactory to find that he did not suspect its existence.

## CHAPTER IV.

It would be needlessly painful to trace the daily course of the insidious disease that was bringing Louisa Castleton to an untimely grave. Its progress was both rapid and certain ; and though from day to day it would, perhaps, hardly be noted, yet from week to week the change was marked and unmistakeable. She had rightly conjectured that she would never again enjoy the same scene that she had done on the evening mentioned in the last chapter. The weather became wet and cold, and she never again was able to quit the house. For some time, however, she descended from her bed-room to the drawing-room, at first on foot with assistance, but after a time carried wholly in her father's arms, who fancied, in his anguish, that he could detect an almost daily diminution in the weight of his burden. At last, this trifling

exertion became too much for her, and she was entirely confined to her sleeping-apartment and the adjoining dressing-room.

It was now evident that her last hour was approaching ; and yet, trying as the anticipation of it was to the loving hearts who surrounded her, they dreaded the closing of the scene—there was such an inexpressible pleasure in the being with her, and hearing her converse. It seemed almost as if they were permitted to hold intercourse with an angel from heaven. It was a melancholy satisfaction to the heart-broken father, to see the blessed results of his own instructions and prayers. The good seed that he had implanted in her heart, and so carefully watched and tended, had indeed brought forth fruit abundantly : she had profited so well, both by his precept and example, that he felt that to have been, under God, the means of fitting such a being for her heavenly home was a source of happiness that might well repay him for all the afflictions of his life of trial.

“ Yes,” he said to his daughter on one

occasion, "I remember well that when your dear mother died, I earnestly wished that I might soon follow her, and be released from a world which seemed to have nought but unhappiness in store for me. I see now that my Heavenly Father had a work for me to do, which would tend both to His glory and to my happiness, and it pleased Him to preserve me for that ; and humbly do I thank Him for having disregarded my ignorant wishes. If I had done nothing since, on which I could reflect with pleasure, but prepare you to follow your sainted mother, I should be well content at my life having been at that time spared."

"Yes, dear father," she replied, "and so it may be now ; and if you are tempted to wish, when I am gone, that you might follow at once, you will recollect what you have just said, will you not ? and think that there may still be something in store for you in this world, which may give you cause, at some future time, to thank the Almighty for having prolonged your existence ; and you will have cause for all your fortitude, all your trust in Providence, for

I feel that the sands of my glass are rapidly, very rapidly, running out."

This conversation took place one evening, just as Mr. Castleton was taking leave of his daughter for the night. Early the next morning, Susan, who slept in a room adjoining, stepped quietly into the dressing-room, and asked the servant, Louisa's old nurse, who slept there with the door open into the bed-room, how Miss Castleton had passed the night.

"I think she has had a very good night, ma'am, she was a little restless, at first, but, since that, I have woke several times, and I have not heard her stir."

"Is she asleep now?"

"Yes, ma'am, I think so, I have not heard her move."

An indefinable impulse prompted Susan to step forward on tiptoe into the inner apartment. She reached the bed, and looked through the curtains, but Louisa's back was turned towards her, and she only saw that she was sleeping soundly; one hand was lying outside the bedclothes, and Susan, fearing lest she might take cold, pondered within herself whether she could



not place the hand beneath the clothes without awaking her. After thinking some time, she determined to attempt it, being encouraged to do so by the soundness with which she appeared to be sleeping; she put forth her hand accordingly, and touched that of the sleeper. Gracious Heavens! it was indeed cold, cold as a stone, cold with that indescribable chill, which only the stroke of death can give. In an agony of terror, Susan placed her hand upon the wrist, in the faint hope that the beating of the pulse might dispel the conviction of the dread truth. The hope was as brief as it was faint—all was over, and the pure spirit had passed away so lightly, that not even a momentary struggle had disturbed the composure of her position, or the regularity of her features. Here was death, indeed, but death disarmed of all its terrors. At first, Susan, was overwhelmed with that natural horror, which we all feel when brought suddenly and unexpectedly into contact with a corpse, but that feeling soon gave way to a kind of religious awe, which stole over her soul. Her thoughts rose from

the lifeless body to the pure spirit, so lately its tenant, but which now, all its troubles at length over, was resting in peace, hopefully awaiting the time when it should once again be clothed with its former garment in its changed and glorified condition. She would have liked to have remained for hours in meditation by the side of the supposed sleeper, but she felt that much was to be done. The tidings must be broken, as tenderly as possible, to Mr. Castleton. The old nurse, too, who was busily dressing herself in the next room, would be dreadfully shocked, and must be carefully brought to the knowledge of the truth. Having gone round, therefore, to the other side of the bed, and gazed once more on the placid countenance, she returned to the dressing-room, and broke the news, as well as she could, to the horror-stricken attendant. She could not, at first, believe that it was possible, that her charge, could thus, as it were, escape her without her knowledge; she slept so lightly, she was sure the least stir must have awakened her. A visit to the bedside, however, dis-

pelled all her doubts, and Susan, leaving the poor old woman drowned in tears, proceeded down stairs, anxiously awaiting the period when Mr. Castleton should be dressed, and come down to her.

She had not long to wait, she had hardly reached the drawing-room, when she heard Mr. Castleton's step emerging from his dressing-room.

Instead, however, of coming downstairs, he went at once to enquire how his daughter had passed the night. Receiving no answer to his knock, he was about to renew his application, when Susan, who had rushed upstairs at the sound, touched him on the arm.

"Hush!" said she. "I have seen her this morning—she was quite still, and nurse told me she thought she had passed a good night."

"Is she asleep still, then?" enquired Mr. Castleton.

"I think you had better not go in at present," replied Susan; and then, in reply to his enquiring glance, she added, "will you come down with me? I have something of importance to tell you."

He followed her in silence. He would perhaps have divined the purport of her communication, but the first sentence she had uttered had completely set his mind at ease. In her anxiety to prevent the blow from falling too suddenly, she had made it more than ever difficult for herself to inflict it. It must be done, however, so when she reached the drawing-room, she said—

“I wished to prevent your being buoyed up with false hopes by the nurse’s news, that Louisa passed a good night—I fear that any such hopes must prove fallacious—I am but too certain that we may not hope to preserve that life much longer.”

“I fear not,” replied he; “indeed, she herself said last night, that she felt her appointed time was at hand, and that made me the more anxious to hear of her this morning. However, a good night is so good a sign, that it certainly has encouraged me a little—and while there is life there is hope.”

“Aye! while there is life,” repeated Susan, in so marked a manner, that Mr. Castleton started and said—

“ You mean more than you say—for Heaven’s sake end this suspense, and tell me at once. Is my child then, no more ? and was the story of her sleep untrue ? ”

“ She has indeed slept sound,” replied Susan ; “ and will never wake again in this world.”

Mr. Castleton sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. It was true he had expected this blow, he had prepared himself for it, but still, when it fell, it came upon him with crushing violence. He soon, however, recovered himself, and rising from his chair, said to Susan—

“ I thank you, for your care in sparing me as far as possible—but I must now go and see her.”

He, accordingly, left the room, and rushed upstairs, and into the chamber of death, expecting to see his daughter as she had breathed her last.

The busy care of the old nurse, however, had deprived him of this last melancholy satisfaction. With the officiousness of her class, she had, immediately she was left alone, set about laying out the

body, and when Mr. Castleton entered the room, the curtains were drawn back, and the corpse, covered only by a sheet, was stretched upon the bed. The window too, had been thrown open, and the chill autumn wind came rustling into the room. There is nothing that brings the fact of the death of a dear friend so home to our hearts, as the neglect of the usual precautions which had been adopted during illness. The dread truth that the stiffening form before us is no longer susceptible of heat, or cold, can no longer distinguish between noise and silence, strikes forcibly upon us, as we see the curtains waving when before, every breath of air had been carefully excluded; when we hear the heavy footfall, the unsubdued voice, where ere while, the softest tread, the gentlest whisper, were deemed almost too noisy. So thought Ferdinand, and it seemed almost a sacrilege to the dead, that it should be treated with so little attention. He stepped to the window, half-closed the shutters, and then, advancing to the bed, gazed with a long and melancholy gaze upon her, who was once his child. As he

stooped over her, and kissed the pale brow, its damp chill shocked and startled him, although he had been prepared for it. A fly which had found a refuge from the autumnal cold, in the warmth of the sick-room, had settled on her person. Indignantly did Ferdinand brush it off, though the thought struck coldly upon his heart, that worms and loathsome things would soon make their lawful banquet upon that lovely form, which the touch of the harmless fly seemed thus to profane.

He endeavoured to direct his thoughts to that glorious time, when the spirit should once more re-enter its deserted mansion ; but the sight of the cold pale corpse lying before him seemed to tie him down to the melancholy present. He reflected therefore that, as such was the case, it was not good for him to be there, and, by a violent effort of self-control, he tore himself away from the room, and with streaming eyes fled to his own apartment. He then shut to the door, and poured forth his overflowing heart to his God. He remained there some time, and great no doubt was the internal struggle ; but, when he again made his

appearance, the victory had been gained, and his manner though, of course, marked by traces of strong emotion, denoted a calm and pious resignation to the will of his Maker.

In the mean time Susan had been nerv-  
ing herself for the further task of informing Wentworth that all was over, and that the cause of his sad visit to Shelbridge had now ceased to exist. It was some time before he made his appearance, and she occupied herself with devising a hundred different ways of giving him the necessary information. At last she became so nervous that she felt herself almost unequal to the task, and had just given way to a fresh burst of tears, when Wentworth unexpectedly entered the apartment. Her tears told her story better than she could have done herself, for Wentworth's heart immediately divined the true cause of her grief.

“ Miss Vernon alone and in tears !” he exclaimed. “ Has any thing occurred upstairs ? are the accounts worse this morning ?”

“ It is all over,” said Susan in a voice



half choked with her sobs. "She is gone, and my only friend in this world has quitted it for a better."

Had Susan intentionally adopted this means of subduing the violence of Wentworth's grief, she could not have better succeeded. His gentle sympathizing nature was so struck with the anguish he saw depicted in her countenance, and with the heart-stricken melancholy of her words, that he well nigh forgot his own sorrow in his anxiety to afford his companion every consolation in his power.

"Nay, say not so, Miss Vernon," he replied. "It may be true that that blessed angel, who is gone, may have been your only female friend in this world, but I hope you will not think lightly of the regard and esteem in which you are held both by Mr. Castleton and myself; and even if your only friend on earth were taken from you, you have a friend in Heaven of whom nothing can deprive you."

"I know it! I know it!" she said; "and believe me I am very grateful for the kind manner in which both you and Mr. Castleton have spoken of your friendship

for me, but when a being like myself, who has nearly years of my existence had pinned it with its sympathy and friendship, and who it has just found them both in the person of the most heavenly of God's creatures, is summed after a brief period of enjoyment to be separated for ever of that sweet source, and is conducted to its former unhappy state, rendered still more unpleasant than the contrast it will present to what has been and what might have been, it is hard at first to bear up against the loss and is subject without a murmur to the great decree."

"It is hard indeed!" replied Westworth, "but I too have my trial to bear."

"Indeed you have," replied Susan; "and believe me I did not mean to be so selfish as to claim a monopoly of unhappiness. Since you came down I was thinking of you and how to break it to you in the lightest way, but you delayed so long that my own sorrows had time to gather strength around me, that I became absorbed in the contemplation of them."

"But now does Mr. Castleton bear the loss?"

“ He was much overcome at first ; but he left me almost immediately to go and look at his daughter, since which I have not seen him, but I think I heard him go to his own room some time ago.”

When Mr. Castleton joined them, he and Wentworth pressed each other's hands warmly without speaking—their hearts were too full for that, but each saw that the other had gained the victory over his feelings, and would henceforward bear his trials with Christian fortitude and resignation.

Seldom has it occurred that the loss of an individual has been felt so severely as was that of Louisa Castleton by the other inmates of Shelbridge Rectory. In her they had respectively lost an only child, an only friend, and the object of the most devoted attachment, while her intrinsic worth naturally added to all the other incentives to mourning her loss ; and yet perhaps never had a loss been borne with more humble resignation, with less outward display of violent grief and affliction.

The spirit of Ferdinand Castleton had infused itself into the breasts of his com-

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## CHAPTER V.

Mr. and Mrs. Lennox having returned from their continental tour, were at this time staying with Mrs. Vernon, at Moor Park. Although they had not been married even one quarter of a year, it was tolerably evident that their matrimonial career was not likely to prove a happy one. Lennox himself had never felt much love for Isabella, and was not likely, when once he was married, to give himself the trouble of feigning an affection that he did not feel; while Isabella, though her main object, the future coronet, had been secured, felt a natural annoyance at finding how completely her charms had failed in gaining her husband's affection. More hurt at this discovery than she chose to confess, she determined to obtain a compensation in another way, and resolved

that, if she were not to be loved, she would not be ruled ;—nay, not only that, but that nothing should be ruled, save according to her sovereign will and pleasure. In fact, she determined to take the reins into her own hands, and make her husband the slave, if not of her charms, at least of her domineering temper. At first Lennox submitted, not from love but from indolence ; but when he found how far matters were likely to be carried, his pride took the alarm, and he commenced a system of resistance to his wife's attempts at obtaining the supremacy. Hence arose ceaseless quarrels and ebullitions of temper, of which there seemed to be no prospect of a termination, the parties being so equally matched. For while Lennox possessed, to a certain extent, the *vis inertiae* of passive resistance, in addition to the authority which a man must always have unless he willingly surrenders it, Isabella was infinitely his superior in strength of purpose and dogged resolution.

It was now Lennox's chief aim to escape, as much as possible, from his wife's society ; but even this indulgence was always pur-

chased at the cost of a storm of reproaches which awaited him on his return ; not that Isabella really cared for his society, but she was glad of an opportunity of fault-finding, and seized upon every chance of proving herself the most injured and neglected of women.'

On the morning, however, on which the sad event occurred which has been detailed in the last chapter, he had contrived to make his escape, and, with his gun upon his shoulder, had gone out under pretence of shooting. He wandered on amongst the hills, thinking that in some of the wooded dells that intersected them he might, perchance, pick up some early woodcock or a stray pheasant that had been frightened out of the neighbouring preserves. His thoughts, however, ran much less upon his game than upon his domestic unhappiness ; and he drew a bitter contrast between his life as it now was, and as it might have been had he been able to marry Louisa Castleton. Of her he had heard little of late, although he was in such near neighbourhood. Susan, in her occasional letters to her mother,

had merely mentioned that she was ill, but had never given a hint of the probability of a fatal termination to her malady, and even from her they had not heard for some time. He did not, therefore, attach much importance to the report of her illness. His heart told him that his conduct had most probably been the cause of it; but, judging from the callousness of his own feelings, he satisfied himself with the notion that there was not much harm done—that people did not die of love in these days—and that she would, probably, soon be well again. It was not, therefore, so much with sorrow for her, as with pity for himself, that his heart was filled, as he walked slowly along with his head bent towards the ground and absorbed in meditation. A rustling in the bushes attracted his attention, and, looking up, he saw standing before him the same gipsy girl whom he had first beheld in the glen near Stapleford Castle, and to whom, though he had on two or three occasions met with her, he had never since spoken.

Now, however, she barred his advance, and, though she did not speak herself,



seemed to expect that he would address her. In his present gloomy state of mind the appearance of the gipsy had something almost supernatural about it that struck terror into his soul. He remembered the last words of the prediction she had uttered respecting himself—

“A punishment just wilt thou find in thy wife.”

The wife then in his thoughts was the charming and innocent Louisa, and he had thought the accomplishment of the prediction impossible; but now he could not help confessing to himself that the prophecy was being fulfilled. On both the other occasions on which he had seen her he had apparently been at a turning point of his destiny. At one time, as he was going to Moor Park, she had given him a warning glance; at the other, when he had finally given up all chance of seeing Louisa, and was driving Isabella into W——, she had pointed after him derisively. What was her present purpose? He felt awed in her presence, and was at a loss how to address her. At last he said—

“Strange being! that appears to haunt

my footsteps, what is your present purpose, and why do you thus arrest my progress? Have you any further predictions to make respecting my future career?"

"Dost thou acknowledge the truth of my last?" replied she. "Has not all turned out as I predicted? Are not you punished for your fickleness, and has not an early grave received the fair young mortal who then accompanied you?"

"No! girl, there you are wrong," replied he. "The young lady who was then with me is alive, and only afflicted with a temporary malady."

"Fool!" replied the girl. "Is it thus thou deceivest thyself? Go home—ask the partner of your joys if she has heard from her sister this morning—and then tell me if you can think that my prophecy is yet unfulfilled?"

So saying, she turned away, and disappeared among the underwood that skirted the path. Lennox turned to follow her, but he heard her descending the steep side of the dell at a pace that defied pursuit. He remained for a second rooted to the spot. Was it possible that her story could

be true? that Louisa Castleton could indeed be numbered with the dead, heart-broken by the cruelty of his conduct? Suspense was intolerable; so, shouldering his gun, he set off, and proceeded with rapid strides in the direction of Moor Park. On reaching the house, and entering the drawing-room, he found his wife and mother-in-law sitting side by side, working and chatting. The sight reassured him; they could not surely look so composed, if the melancholy intelligence to which the gipsy had alluded had indeed arrived. His look brightened, and he was on the point of reproaching himself for his credulity, when his eye fell on a letter with a deep black edge, which seemed to have been allowed to drop carelessly at his wife's feet. Once more his heart sank within him, and he exclaimed,—

“For Heaven's sake! Isabella, tell me, is that letter from your sister, and why is she in such deep mourning?”

“That letter is from Susan,” replied Mrs. Lennox, carelessly; “but why she has chosen to write on such dismal paper

I can't tell. We have not lost any of our relations, that I am aware of."

"But somebody is dead, surely," urged Lennox. "At any rate, let me see the letter."

"Indeed, Charles," said his wife, "I don't know why you should want to read my letters. Surely you can have no objection to my receiving a private communication from my own sister."

"Objection, nonsense !" said he. "You may have fifty private letters if you like, if you will but tell me what she says of Miss Castleton."

"Really, Charles, I should be quite jealous, if it were not that that old flirt of yours, whom you seem to take so great an interest in, is no longer in a position to interfere. I was going to tell you, only you interrupted me so, and were so impatient and so very cross, that Susan writes to inform us that the young lady in question died this morning ; and that, as she cannot well stay in the house alone with the widower Mr. Castleton, and the bachelor Mr. Wentworth, we may expect to

see her here again as soon as the funeral is over."

Lennox did not hear the end of this speech, having left the room in a state of mind bordering on distraction.

She was then dead, and he had killed her. By his selfishness, and by his crimes, he had caused the death of the being, who had loved him so truly and so deeply, as to pay the forfeit with her life. He had thrown away the priceless jewel of her love for the filthy lucre, which he now saw was so little likely to contribute to his happiness. The awful event which had just occurred, while it showed him how deeply he had been beloved, manifested to him also the extent of his passion for her; and intense was his agony, as he reflected that she was dead, and he tied for the remainder of his life as the husband of another. Remorse, grief, anger, and despondency struggled within him for the mastery, and a prey to his own unsubdued passions and to the stings which memory was inflicting, he was by far a more pitiable object than the three bereaved ones, who,

with humble piety and resignation, were mastering their affliction at Shelbridge.

For the whole day did he roam about the country a prey to grief and despair, and the short twilight of November had deepened into darkness ere he returned to the house.

On meeting his wife he was, of course, overwhelmed with a torrent of reproaches.

"Pretty conduct this!" said she, "in the third month of our marriage. Here am I left at home the whole blessed day, while you go roaming about the country, bewailing yourself like a madman, because a little trumpery girl, whom you used to flirt with, has paid the penalty of her folly. But I tell you what it is, Charles, if you go on in this way you'll kill me, as you have already killed her. I wish to goodness you had married her, if you were so fond of her; then I might have had a chance of getting a husband who would have behaved as a husband should, and not go about neglecting his wife, and crying after another woman, whom a married man like you has no business even to think about."

This speech naturally enough produced an angry rejoinder, and it may be easily imagined that the harmony of the evening was not much increased by this auspicious commencement. Never had Lennox felt less affection for his wife—never had he felt greater disgust at the vulgarity of his mother-in-law, than on this occasion, when his imagination was busy picturing to itself the different scenes that might have been enacted, had his conduct been what it should have been.

As he contrasted his storming, sarcastic wife with the gentle and yielding Louisa, and thought of the difference between the vulgar, worldly Mrs. Vernon, and the grave, yet agreeable, manner which he had always heard attributed to Mr. Castleton—bitter indeed were his regrets, that he was not spending his first married visit at Shelbridge Rectory, rather than at Moor Park ; and deep was his remorse, when he reflected that all this might have been, had he so willed it ; but that he had wilfully cast away his own happiness, and brought death, and grief, and misery upon

those who would so willingly have contributed to it.

The thought was madness, and, wretched as he was in the society to which he was doomed, he felt that even that was preferable to solitude. It was better to bear the reproaches of his wife than the stings of his own conscience.



**CHAPTER VI.**

THE day had now arrived, on which all that remained in this world of Louisa Castleton was to be committed to the earth. Lord Stapleford, whose increasing age and infirmities had prevented his coming over to Shelbridge to be present at the last moments of his beloved granddaughter, had wished that her remains should be interred in the family vault at Stapleford Castle ; but Ferdinand had replied that, although he was willing to comply with his father's wishes if the latter still persisted in them, he should much prefer that his daughter should be buried in his own churchyard, that her tomb might be always in his sight for the remainder of his days ; and Lord Stapleford had accordingly withdrawn his request, and yielded to his son's wishes.

It was therefore in the churchyard of

Shelbridge that the melancholy ceremony was to take place. It was a dark and gloomy afternoon in November; the murky clouds, seeming almost to touch the tops of the trees, swept rapidly yet heavily across the heavens, discharging occasionally a drizzling mist, which increased more and more as the sun went down. The ground covered with withered leaves was rotten and spongy, while the water oozed up in the footsteps of the passer-by. The few leaves that yet remained on the trees hung heavily from the dripping branches, or, as a gust of wind rather stronger than common swept across them were hurled to the ground, to contribute their quota to the rotting heaps beneath them. All was dark and cheerless in the extreme. The usually beautiful picture was marred and mutilated; the thick fog concealed all the more distant features, while even those that were visible were scarcely to be recognized, so changed did they appear in the dull, dreary, twilight.

Four o'clock had been appointed as the hour for the funeral, but an accident having delayed the clergyman who was to officiate,

it was past five when the head of the melancholy procession was seen entering the sacred precincts. The misty rain had now increased to a decided down-pour, and the twilight had been deepened by the cloudy state of the atmosphere into darkness itself. It was therefore with difficulty that those who were awaiting the procession could discern its slow approach.

The distance from the parsonage to the churchyard was but trifling, so that the assistance of mourning coaches and all their paraphernalia had been dispensed with, and the coffin, borne on the shoulders of four men, was covered by a pall, supported by girls, the attendants on Louisa's own school, whom she herself had named for the melancholy office a short time before her death. After these came Ferdinand Castleton himself as chief mourner, accompanied by Wentworth, whose grief was far less under control than his own.

As soon as the procession emerged from the gates of the Rectory it was joined by a number of the parishioners, young and old, male and female, who, despite the inclemency of the weather, had determined to

pay this last tribute of respect to her who was so well-beloved by them all.

Amongst them was one, who, although he had been one of the earliest in attendance, and had waited the longest, was not apparently acquainted with any of the others ; for during the whole period, while they were waiting, he had not exchanged salutations, or spoken a word with any one of them. He was wrapped in a large mourning cloak, which completely concealed his figure, while his hat, to which a large crape hatband was attached, was pulled low over his eyes, and a white handkerchief, which he held to his mouth as if to exclude the damp cold air, served effectually to disguise his features. So engrossed was the attention of all those assembled by the melancholy occasion that had brought them together, that his presence attracted no observation, and the deepening gloom soon shaded him from their view.

When the procession emerged into the road, he fell into a place at no great distance from the bier, and followed it closely into the church, where he took up his position near the door, so that when they again

moved into the open air, he was enabled to secure a place on one side of the grave, almost opposite to the officiating clergyman. A lantern had been brought to enable the latter to read the service, and as its light fell upon the assembled party, Lennox, for it was no other than he, cast a hasty glance at a woman standing by his side, whose grief seemed even more unrestrained than that of the others, and who appeared almost suffocated with the sobs that threatened to break her heart. He started—could it be? Yes; undoubtedly it was the same Mary that he had so heartlessly deserted a few months before. The betrayer and the betrayed were standing side by side; and while one of his victims was being committed to the grave, another was standing weeping by his side. She, however, was evidently unconscious of his proximity, and burying his face in his handkerchief, he trusted that he should contrive to escape her observation.

Meanwhile, the sad ceremony proceeded—"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," said the deep voice of the minister, and as the stones rattled, and the

wet earth fell heavily upon the coffin, nature would have its course, and the loud heart-rending sobs burst unrestrained from the bosom of Ferdinand, whose resignation and composure up to this moment had been the wonder of all beholders—while Wentworth, who had always exhibited a less amount of self-control, wept like a little child. As he gazed on these men, whose identity he conjectured (for he had never seen Ferdinand, and only once had encountered Wentworth, and that in a far different scene), so acute a pang of remorse shot through his heart, that when the ceremony was over, and the mourners were sadly retiring, he made his way to Ferdinand, who for a moment had been separated from Wentworth, and standing bare-headed before him, spoke thus—

“ A heart-broken and repentant sinner, Mr. Castleton, craves your forgiveness for the greatest injury that could have been inflicted upon you ”

Ferdinand started. The words, however, left no doubt in his mind as to the identity of the unknown stranger.

“ You have it, my son, you have it,”

he replied. "May the God of Heaven forgive you for the sins you have committed against Him, as freely as I do for the grief you have caused to me."

And taking Lennox's hand, he pressed it warmly, and breathed a fervent prayer that the repentance spoken of might not be the momentary effect of a temporary remorse, but might result in the true turning of the sinner's heart towards God.

As Lennox turned away, the light of the lantern fell full upon his face, from which he had now removed the handkerchief, and revealed to the unfortunate Mary Brown, who was still near him, the features of him, whom she once loved so well, and whom she had so much cause to hate. A faint shriek announced her consciousness of his presence, but as Lennox turned to retire, she laid her hand firmly on his cloak.

"Nay, you leave me not thus," said she. "Attempt not to escape me, or I will proclaim to this assembly of mourners that you are the wretch that brought that departed angel to her tomb, and you

would be torn in pieces, ere you could raise your hand to defend yourself."

"Hush! Mary hush!" replied he, alarmed lest she should really carry her threat into execution. "I will not go yet, but tell me, how is your child?"

"Here," she said, pointing with her foot to a small mound of earth, "here it lies, rotting in its grave; my child! our child! your child fell an early victim to its father's neglect and cruelty. Yes, sir, if you want to know more, the child died of illness, contracted during the time when you left it to roam about the streets with me, a houseless wanderer, and I should have been dead, too, had it not been for the goodness of one on whom you have also inflicted a deadly wound."

"What mean you?" asked Lennox.

"I mean," she replied, "one whom you first deprived of Miss Castleton's love, as you afterwards deprived her of her life; one who, when I was left desolate and starving, gave me bread to eat, and words of comfort, hardly less necessary to my existence, and sent me down here, where that angel of goodness, whom you have



destroyed, would have made my life worth having, if she had lived."

"You mean, I suppose, Mr. Wentworth?"

"I do," said she; "and I wonder how you dared to stand by that grave, face to face with those you have so deeply wronged."

"But after all," said Lennox, "you do not know that I had anything to do with poor Miss Castleton's death?"

"Do I not?" she replied. "Nay, if you are anxious to hear more, I can tell you more than you will like to know. In the delirium of fever your hated name escaped me—and she, who was watching by my bedside, discovered that she had been betrayed; that, while you professed to love her, you were occupied in ruining me; she discovered your utter unworthiness, for, till then, spite of your conduct, she had loved you, and she never held her head up afterwards. Two innocent victims you have hurried to the grave; would that I, the guilty one, could be added to their number—but it may not be, and I must live and bear my life, burdened as it is with the heavy curse of the memory of

past iniquity. You have condemned Mr. Castleton and Mr. Wentworth to a life of bereavement and affliction, but on me you have inflicted an injury far more cruel than theirs, and their grief is happiness compared to my sufferings. Go, now, reflect on the misery you have caused, and may the stings of conscience be your plague for evermore."

Goaded to madness by her words, Lennox fled from her presence. All the soothing influence which the mild and forgiving words of Mr. Castleton had infused into his soul was banished by the fierce denunciations of the unhappy girl, and the further revelations she had made to him of the extent of the iniquities he had committed, and the misery he had caused.

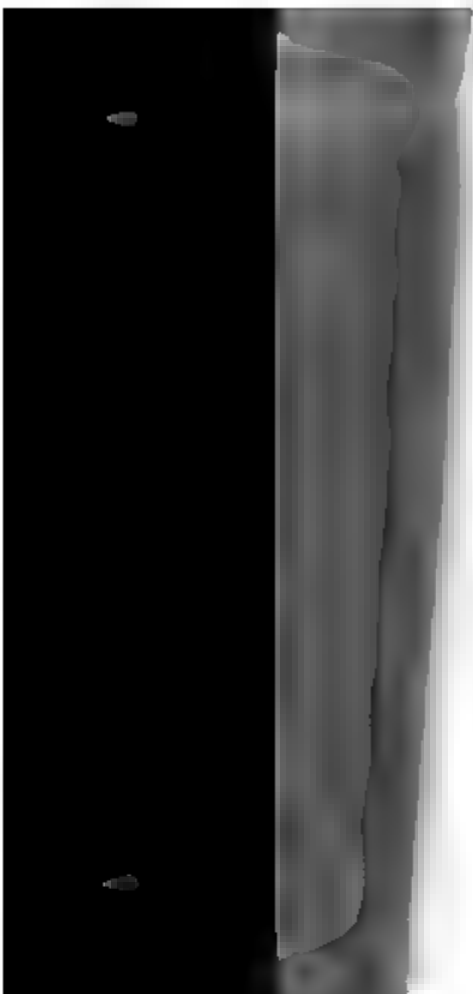
In the mean time, Ferdinand and Wentworth returned to the Rectory, and as the former entered the house, which was now to be his solitary home, his heart sank within him at the melancholy prospect, and the wish of his heart rose to his lips, as they murmured—

"If it be Thy will, O Lord, grant that I may soon be set at liberty from this

world of sorrow, and may be permitted to follow those loved ones who have preceded me ; but if it be Thy will that I remain, and if Thou hast yet work for me to do, grant me strength to bear up under my trials !”

\* \* \* \* \*

The prayer was granted. The cold and wet to which he had been exposed at the funeral, added to the excited state of his nervous system, brought on an attack of fever, from which he never rallied, and in less than a month after the death of his daughter, Ferdinand Castleton had ceased to exist. His consciousness remained to the last, and his last words to Lord Abbotsham, who had come over on hearing of his illness, were to the effect that he now recognized the goodness of the Almighty in all his dealings, who had both inflicted such trials as to wean him entirely from the world, and had also removed before him those for whose earthly welfare, after his departure, his soul would otherwise have been troubled. “ Now,” he said, “ there is nothing between me and my



## POSTSCRIPT.

UPWARDS of three years have elapsed since the conclusion of my tale ; and for the information of those readers who may have taken an interest in the various other personages of my story, a few words shall be added to give a brief account of their present fortunes.

.On Ferdinand Castleton's death, Wentworth asked and obtained the living of Shelbridge from the government, his uncle the dean having consented to appoint the government nominee to the living in Yorkshirc, which was of a greater value. It may seem strange that Wentworth should have wished to continue in a spot fraught with such melancholy associations. He could not, however, bear to part from it for ever : he wished to be near the tomb of her he had loved so dearly, and he felt as if a stranger's presence would profane a spot so sacred.



there was no person living who could contribute so much to his happiness as she could ; that he did not ask her to avow that she loved him, but that simply, if she thought that by marrying him she should be enabled to pass a happier existence than at present, he begged that she would not hesitate to take a step, which would contribute so much to their mutual happiness.

Susan's joy may be imagined. She was not hurt at the coldness of such a proposal : once his wife, she trusted that she should be able to win a far greater share of his heart than he at present offered. She hesitated for some time about confessing her love to him ; but at last, thinking it best to pursue the most open course, she not only accepted his offer, but informed him that she had long loved him, and him alone. There is no incitement to love so great as the knowledge that we are beloved ; and Wentworth no sooner discovered that he had been the object of attachment to a person whom he esteemed so highly as Susan, than a reciprocal flame began to kindle in his breast, and before the marriage took place, he had learnt to

regard her with very lover-like feelings.

They were married in due course, and their marriage promises to be a happy one. They are already blessed with one daughter, whom they have named Louisa, and to whom Lady Abbotsham and Lady Barbara Fyfe-dell have become godmothers. They do not appear to forget the past—on the contrary, it frequently forms the subject of their thoughts and of their conversation, and they never pass the simple monument that has been raised over the tomb of the hapless Louisa, without a subdued feeling of sorrow, and at the same time a confident assurance, that if it is permitted to her from her present abode to contemplate things in this world, she derives an addition to her bliss from witnessing the happiness of those whom, when on this earth, she had loved so well.

The fate of Mr and Mrs. Lennox has been a very different one. The good effect produced by his remorse at the death of Louisa Castleton speedily passed away. The seed was sown indeed, but it fell upon stony ground, and the birds of the air de-



voured it. Unhappy in his own mind, unhappy in his home, made miserable by the overbearing temper of his wife, and stung to madness by the constant reproaches of his conscience, he flies for relief to scenes of vice and dissipation. The money he obtained by his luckless marriage is dissipated at the gaming-table, and poverty begins to throw an additional cloud over a life which intemperance and disease have embittered, and threaten to shorten.

Lord Lennox, indignant at his son's conduct, has determined to leave the bulk of his property to his second son, which he does the more readily, as his eldest-born has no children.

If, as is not improbable, intemperance and vice hurry Lennox to an early grave in his father's lifetime, Isabella will not only miss the coronet she has so much coveted, but will be left with the slender provision of £10,000, which was all that was settled upon her at her marriage; and, instead of being a wealthy heiress, will subside into a poor widow, with a doubtful reputation.

Of the other personages little remains

as he deserved. Old Lord Suspiciord did not ever survive his well-loved son. He lived just long enough to rejoice at the birth of a grandson, and then, full of years and of wisdom, he was gathered to his fathers.

The present Lord Suspiciord continues to live at Suspiciord Castle, in the greatest domestic happiness. He now is a prosperous boy, and a little daughter has recently been added to the family.

Captain and Mrs. Macdonald also continue to be specimens of conjugal happiness, though of a somewhat different description. The tragical tale of *Loose Castles* has been quite a godsend to her, but she has interwoven and adorned it with so many embellishments of her own, that those who have heard the story from her lips will scarcely recognize it for the tale that has been detailed in these pages.

On Lady Barbara the tale of her niece made a deep impression, the more so, she had all along affected to treat it as a trifling one, and was therefore inexpressibly shocked at hearing of its death. She has not, it is true, given

the world, but she has come to look upon it as of but secondary importance, and has learnt to use the good things of this life without abusing them. It is a severe mortification to her that she continues childless ; but in Mr. Wentworth's little girl, and her sister, Lady Abbotsham's children, she finds a great interest, and is regarded by them with the greatest love and affection.

The gipsy disappeared soon after the death of Louisa, and has never been since seen in that part of the country.

Susan and her husband often ponder over the wonderful fulfilment of her prediction, and puzzle themselves to account for it. That she herself firmly believed in her prophetic powers there is no doubt ; but as we can hardly admit that hypothesis, we must be content either to refer the fulfilment to some strange and accidental coincidence, or have recourse to the supposition that she had access to means of becoming acquainted with Lennox's character that we are not aware of, and that in that manner she was enabled to form a tolerable guess as to the probable issue of

a courtship which one so observant as herself could not fail of detecting.

Mary Brown, after the violent ebullition of temper to which she gave way at the sight of Lennox, was seized with another attack of fever, which nearly brought her to the grave. She recovered, however, and has since devoted herself entirely to the care of her old grandmother, who still survives. Wentworth and Susan are unremitting in their attentions to her, and have completed the good work that Louisa Castleton and her father had begun. She is deeply grateful to them for their kindness, but she still looks back with fondness to the memory of her former benefactors, and is constantly to be seen hovering about the spot where reposes all that was mortal of Ferdinand Castleton and his well-loved daughter.

THE END.







